Rāma with an Axe

Myth and Cult of Paraśurāma Avatāra

Pradeep Kant Choudhary

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Ramendra Nath Nandi

The purpose of the present study is to reconstruct social processes in the North West of South Asia during the Middle Bronze Age and correlate textual and archaeological data to this effect. The basis of textual evidence is the earliest Vedic literature of South Asia, much of which took a concrete shape during the late third and early second millennium BC. The correlation is warranted by the fact that an oral literature of intense religious nature cannot surface from a social void and that the development must have been accompanied by overbearing social compulsions and a state of contingency brought about by catastrophic events in nature and society. The text, which publicizes an ideology of nature worship, already documents quantifiable evidence of both these developments.

Viewed in this context, the bardic documentation of decaying urban places, deflated social classes and regressive productive forces can be of considerable help in figuring out the dynamic of social change in a decadent urban society. The new religious dispensation cut across ethno-cultural boundaries, which are fairly well delimited by divergent archaeological assemblages in the Greater Indus valley and tried to integrate as many diverse groups of people as possible under a common religious umbrella.

The book draws attention to the migration of ethnic Europeans from an intermittently freezing early Holocene Europe to warmer latitudes in and around the Indo-Iranian subcontinent, the eventual birth of a new linguistic relative of the Indo- Iranian family during the fifth millennium BC and the ultimate spread of the 'centum' division in the wake of a diasporic return to Europe, which was experiencing warm and humid conditions from the beginning of the fourth millennium BC. The cultural 'markers' associated with European steppes also turn out to be the doings of certain Iranian peoples, particularly the saka Iranians who were migrating to different parts of south-eastern Europe from the beginning of the second millennium BC.

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For
Mā and Papaji

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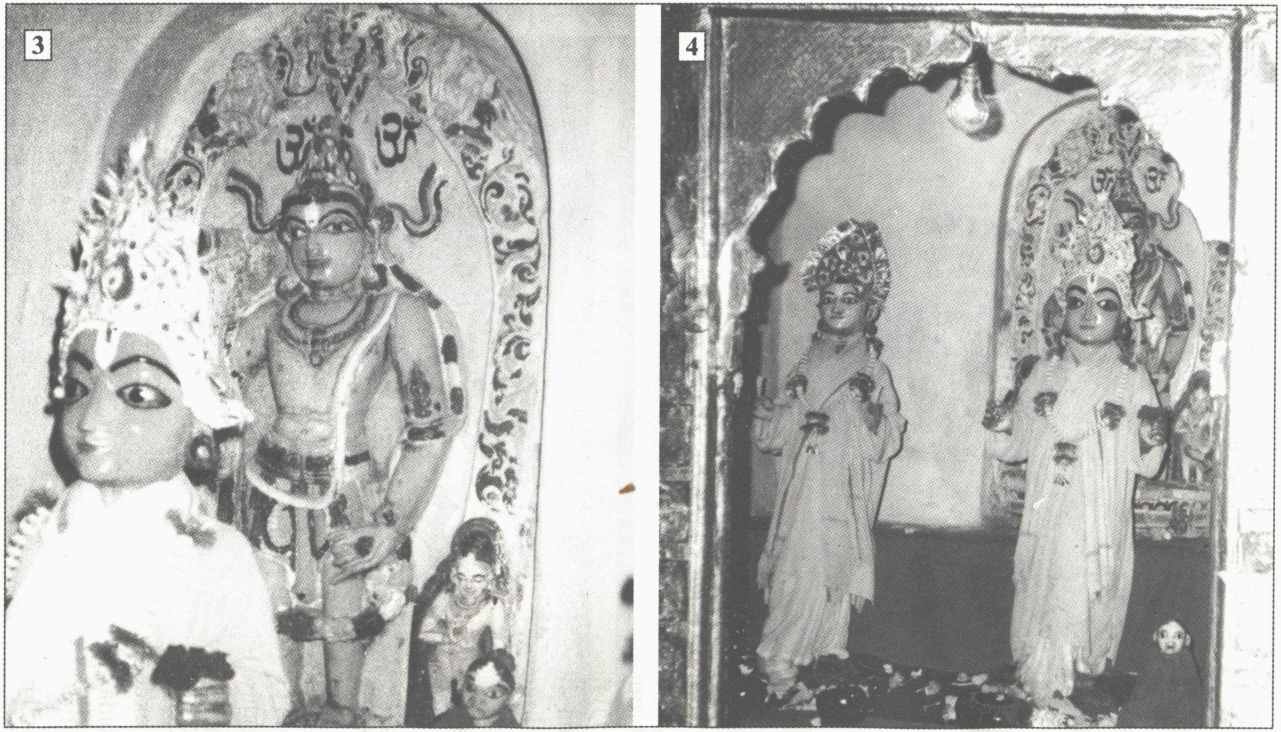
Abbreviations

ABORI	:	*Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*
AIOC	:	*All India Oriental Conference*
AITM	:	*Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology*
ASI	:	Archaeological Survey of India
AUS	:	*The Allahabad University Studies*
B.	:	*Mahābhārata*, Chitrasala Press, Pune
BCE	:	Before Common Era
CE	:	Common Era
C.E.	:	*Mahābhārata*, Critical Edition, Pune
EI	:	*Epigraphia Indica*
GP	:	*Mahābhārata*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur
IA	:	*The Indian Antiquary*
JBBRAS	:	*Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.*
JOI	:	*Journal of the Oriental Institute, University of Baroda*
JOR	:	*Journal of Oriental Research*
JUB	:	*Journal of University of Bombay*
NIA	:	*New Indian Antiquary*
SBE	:	*Sacred Book of the East,* ed. F. Max Muller

1. Paraśurāma Temple, Renuka lake, Sirmur, Himachal Pradesh

2. Kālakāma Paraśurāma Nirmanda, Himachal Pradesh



3. & 4. Takeover of Paraśurāma Shrine by Dāśarathī Rāma, Areraj, Bihar.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I

"Having performed all that *ṛṣi* Lomaśa had ordered, Yudhiṣṭhira went to the mount Mahendra. He lived there for one night with his brothers and gave highest honours to the ascetics. He then asked Akṛtavraṇa, the follower of Paraśurāma, when will the illustrious Rāma show himself to ascetics here? I desire to see that descendent of Bhṛgu. Akṛtavraṇa said: Your coming here is already known to Rāma, whose soul spontaneously knows everything. Rāma is pleased with you. He will soon show himself to you. The ascetics see Rāma on fourteenth and eight day of the lunar month. At the close of this night, the fourteenth day of the lunar course will set in. Yudhiṣṭhira said: You are a follower of the mighty Rāma, the son of Jamadagni. You must have personally seen all the great deeds performed by him in the days of yore. Therefore, narrate to us today how the kshatriyas were vanquished by him in battle and what was the cause of it. Akṛtavraṇa said, O foremost of kings, O descendent of Bharata, I shall with great pleasure narrate to you the excellent story of celestial-like deed of Rāma, the son of Jamadagni, who was born in the race of Bhṛgu. I shall also narrate the history of Kārtavīrya, the king of the Haiheyas.

"The king of Haiheya named Arjuna, was killed by Rāma. O son of Pāṇḍu, he had one thousand arms and seven wonderful

weapons. O Lord of the earth, through the favour of Dattātreya he possessed a golden car. His wealth was the whole earth including all creatures. The car of that illustrious hero could go everywhere unobstructed. Being greatly powerful by boons, he trampled upon the celestials, the yakṣha, the *ṛṣis* and persecuted all creatures wherever they were found. Thereupon the celestials and the *ṛṣis* of the great vows all met together and they thus spoke to the god of gods, slayers of Asuras, Viṣṇu of great prowess, "O Lord, O Exalted One, kill Arjuna to protect all the creatures. The Lord, the ruler of Haiheyas on his celestial car, chastised even Vāsava [Indra] when he was escorting with Śachi. O descendent of Bharata, thereupon Viṣṇu held a consultation with Śakra [Indra] as how to kill Kārtavīrya and promising to do all went to Badri, his most favourite hermitage.

"At this very time there lived on earth a mighty king in Kānyakubja—a monarch of great prowess known in the world by the name of Gādhi. But he retired into the forest. When he was living in the forest a daughter was born to him as beautiful as an *apsarā*. O descendent of Bharata, Ṛchika the son of Bhṛgu asked her for marriage. Thereupon Gādhi spoke thus to that brahmana of rigid vows, 'There is a custom in our family established from the days of yore. O foremost of brahmana know, the bridegroom must give a dowry of one thousand swift and brown-coloured and black-eared horses. O son of brahmana, O Exalted One, you cannot be asked to give such a dowry. O Exalted One, my daughter also cannot be refused, when asked by you. Do what is proper.' Ṛchika said 'I shall give one thousand swift, brown-coloured and black eared horses. Let your daughter become my wife.' Akṛtavraṇa said: O King, having thus promised, Ṛchika spoke to Varuṇa, 'Give me one thousand swift, brown-coloured and black eared horses to be my dowry'. Varuṇa immediately gave him one thousand such horses. The place where the horses rose from the Gaṅgā in Kānyakubja, is celebrated as Aśvatīrtha. Then the king bestowed Satyavatī, his daughter to Ṛchika. In the marriage of the daughter of Gādhi even the celestials were present. This is how that foremost of the brahmana, Ṛchika obtained one thousand horses and got

Satyavatī as wife according to the ordinance. He then sported with that slender-waisted damsel at pleasure.

"O King, when the marriage ceremony was over, Bhṛgu came to see his excellent son, who with his wife duly worshipped him; and seeing them Bhṛgu was greatly pleased. When the preceptor Bhṛgu, the adored of all the celestials, was seated, the husband and wife, after duly worshipping him with joined hands stood before him and waited for his command. Thereupon the exalted Bhṛgu with delighted heart thus spoke to his daughter-in-law, "O blessed girl, ask for a boon. I am ready to grant you what you desire". She gratified the preceptor in order to obtain a son for herself and for her mother; and he too granted her desire. Bhṛgu said, at the time of period you and your mother after bathing at the proper time must embrace two different trees, she an *aśvattha /pīpal* tree and you a *udumbara /gular* tree. O blessed girl, after having ransacked the whole universe these two *charus* [magical preparation] have been made by me with the utmost care. They must be taken with the greatest care. And then he disappeared. But they made an exchange, both in the case of the *charus* and the embracing of trees.

"After a long time that exalted *ṛṣi*, Bhṛgu, again came there and perceiving all by his divine knowledge the great effulgent Bhṛgu thus spoke to his daughter-in-law Satyavati, 'O blessed girl, O maiden of lovely brow, you have taken the wrong *charu* and embraced the wrong tree. It was your mother who has deceived you. Your son, though a brahmana, will adopt the practices of kshatriyas. The mighty son of your mother, though a kshatriya, will adopt the practices of brahmana. His power will be great; he will tread the path of the righteous. Thereupon she again and again adored her father-in-law, saying, "Let not my son be of this character, let my grandson be such. "O son of Pāṇḍu", he replied, "be it so" and he was pleased to grant her prayer. When the proper time came, her son was born, and named Jamadagni. This descendent of Bhṛgu was endued with both splendour and grace. He grew in years as well as in strength; and he excelled all in the Vedas. O best of Bhārata race, the science of arms with four kinds

of weapons rivalling the lustre of the sun spontaneously and without instructions came to him.

"Akṛtavraṇa said ascetic Jamadagni devoted himself to the study of the Vedas and performed great austerities. After pursuing a methodical course of study he masted the Vedas. Then, going to King Prasenajit, he asked his daughter Reṇukā in marriage and the king bestowed her upon him. Having got Reṇukā as his wife, that son of Bhṛgu came with her to the hermitage and, assisted by her, he began to practise asceticism. Four scions were born of her, Rāma being the fifth. Though Rāma was the youngest, he became the superior to all in the merit. One day when her sons had all gone away to gather fruits, Reṇukā of rigid vows went to bathe. O King, when she was going at pleasure Reṇukā saw Chitraratha, the king of Mṛttikāvat. Seeing the king adorned with garlands of lotus, sporting in the water with his wives, Reṇukā was filled with desire. Being unable to control this awful desire, she became polluted; she then returned to her hermitage much frightened at heart. Having seen her deprived of the lustre of chastity and full of giddiness, that greatly effulgent and mighty *ṛṣi* reproached her by crying "fie". There came then the eldest of Jamadagni's son, Rumnavāna, and then Suṣeṇa, then Vasu and then Viśvavasu. The exalted ṛṣi one after the other asked them to kill their mother. But they were confounded and could not utter a word. Then he cursed them in great anger and having been thus cursed, they lost their senses and became like inanimate objects. They became in conduct like beasts and birds. Then that slayer of hostile heroes, Rāma came to the hermitage last of all and to him said the great ascetic and mighty armed Jamadagni, "O son, kill your this sinful mother without the least compunctions". Immediately Rāma took an axe and cut off his mother's head. O great king, the anger of the illustrious Jamadagni was then suddenly appeased; and being much pleased he thus spoke, "O child, O virtuous man, you have performed the difficult task at my bidding. Ask me, I shall grant you whatever you desire in your heart". Rāma asked that his mother might be restored to life, that she not be haunted by the remembrance of this cruel deed, that he might not be touched by

any sin, that his brothers might be restored to their former state, that he might be unrivalled in battle, and that he might obtain a long life. O descendents of Bharata, the great ascetic Jamadagni granted him all that he desired.

"O Lord, once at a time when his sons had again gone out to gather fruits, the mighty son of Kritavīrya, the king of the country near the seashore, came to the hermitage. When he came to the hermitage he was hospitably received by the *ṛṣi*'s wife. But, proud of prowess, he was not pleased with the reception. By force and in defiance of all resistance, he seized and carried off from the hermitage the chief cow whose milk supplied the sacred *ghee*, not at all heeding the loud lowing of her calf. And he wantonly pulled down the trees of the hermitage. When Rāma came home his father told him all that had happened. Seeing the calf lowing piteously, Rāma became exceedingly angry. He rushed towards the son of Kritavīrya, who was under the shadow of death. The slayer of the hostile heroes, the descendent of Bhṛgu displayed his prowess in the battle. O King, with sharpened arrows which were shot from a beautiful bow, he cut down Arjuna's one thousand arms, each of which was like a massive iron bolt [for barring the door]. Being under the shadow of death, he was overpowered by Rāma.

"Then the relatives of Arjuna with their wrath excited against Rāma rushed at Jamadagni one day when Rāma was absent from the hermitage. Although he was powerful they killed him, for he was engaged in asceticism. O Yudhiṣṭhira, attacked by them he again and again piteously uttered the name of Rāma. The sons of Kārtavīrya pierced Jamadgani with their arrows, and having thus persecuted their enemy, they went their way. When they had gone away and Jamadagni had breathed his last, Bhārgava Rāma came back to the hermitage with fuel for the religious rites and saw that his father has been killed. Being exceedingly grieved, he lamented the sad fate that had befallen his father. Rāma said: "O father, for my fault you have been killed like a deer in the forest with arrows by those mean and foolish wretches, the sons of Kārtavīrya. O father, virtuous and ever steady in the honest path as you were, how can fate permit that you should die in this way? What an

awful sin must have been committed by them who have with hundreds of arrows killed you, who were ever engaged in asceticism, who were old and who were averse to fight with them. How can those shameless men speak of their shameful deed to their friends and relatives that they have killed a virtuous man who was averse to fight"? Akṛtavraṇa said, thus did he lament in piteous manner, and then that great ascetic performed all the obsequies of his deceased father. That conqueror of hostile cities, Rāma then set fire to the funeral pyre of his father and took an oath to destroy all the kshatriyas.

"That mighty hero, greatly powerful in battle, equal to the god of death himself, then took up weapons in anger, and alone he killed the sons of Kārtavīrya. The foremost of all wielders of arms, Rāma destroyed all those kshatriyas, who were their followers. Twenty-one times that lord made the earth kshatriya-less and with their blood he made five lakes at Samantapañchaka. That perpetrator of the Bhṛgu race then tried to offer the oblations [*tarpaṇa*] to his ancestors [with the blood], but Ṛchika appeared to him in visible form and stopped him. Then the mighty son of Jamadagni offered libations to the lord of the celestials in a great sacrifice, in which he bestowed the earth to his priests [*ṛtwijas*]. O King, he built an altar made of gold which was twenty yards in breadth and nine in heights and made a gift of it to the illustrious Kaśyapa. O King, then at the request of Kaśyapa the brahmanas divided it into a number of shares and thus they came to be called *khāṇḍavāyaṇas* [share takers]. O King, having bestowed the earth on the illustrious Kaśyapa, he engaged in severest austerities on Mahendra, the foremost of mountains. Thus did hostility arise between him and the kshatriyas that lived on the earth. The entire world was thus conquered by the immeasurably effulgent Rāma." [***Mahābhārata***, Āraṇyakaparva, 3.115–117; trns. from M.N. Dutt, *Mahābhārata,* Vol. 2 pp. 174–178, Abridged with minor modifications]

II

"When the sons of Sagara were digging up the Earth, the entire Gōkarṇa region along with many hermitages of sages fell into the

waters of the ocean. Those sages visited Bhārgava Rāma at Mount Mahendra and requested him to get their hermitage back from the ocean and order the sea to recede from that area. Bhārgava Rāma, after facing some dilemma about picking up arms again or not, finally got ready and reached Gōkarṇa with his great bow *Vijaya*. He stood facing south and spoke these words to Varuṇa in deep resonant voice, 'I have come here along with groups of sages with a desire to see you. Hence, take up your own form O Prachetas, and grant me your vision.' But, despite hearing these words, Varuṇa did not move from his place. After making repeated calls without any reply, Rāma looked at him angrily. Being much infuriated, he assumed a form similar to that of an agitated ocean and wished to make the ocean devoid of waters by resorting to his own inherent power. Then he sat near his bow *Vijaya* and sipped the water ceremoniously. Rāma bowed down mentally to Śarva and took up the great bow. With his eyes turned reḍ due to anger, he drew the bow. Then with great force, Rāma fixed an arrow comparable to the *Kālānala* [fire at the end of the world]. He joined to it a very terrible missile, belonging to Bhṛgu and having the fire god as its deity. Thereupon the Earth, including the mountains, forests and parks quaked and trembled. The entire world was shivering and Rāma was looking dreadful in this background. He shook with anger and his body, which was terrible with its flames like the fire at the end of *kalpa*, appeared like the circular face of Viṣṇu's discus. Rāma attained the excessively terrific form of Viṣṇu in the guise of the Man-Lion. As he drew the bow, Rāma's body with the face having eyebrow knitted, became like that of Śiva, desirous of burning the Tripuras formerly. Struck by the heat of blazing fire of the missile, the water of the ocean became stirred up and the tide began to flow, the living beings in the deep waters became extremely distressed. With all his limbs quaking with fear, the lord of rivers gave up his natural courage and became a coward. He assumed his real form and appeared near Bhārgava as though he was extremely afraid of the swift arrow. Having fallen at the lotus-like feet of Paraśurāma, the extremely frightened Varuṇa spoke with words faltering due to excitement, "Protect me, O bravest

among the members of the family of the Bhṛgu, protect me with sympathy. I have sought refuge in you. Forgive this offence of mine, O Rāma, committed by me in ignorance. I stand by abiding your directive, command me—what shall I do?"

"On seeing Varuṇa fall on the ground at his feet, the intelligent leading member of the family of Bhṛgu, withdrew the missile. Anger having subsided, he said to him smilingly: "These leading sages who had their homes in Gokarṇa had come to me. The holy spot Gokarṇa inhabited by the sages was caused to fall down into your waters formerly, by the sons of Sagara, who were digging the Earth. Hence, for my sake, it behoves you to make your water recede and restore to them that holy spot in the water as before. Varuṇa said, "My water cannot be made to recede by any one such is the boon granted to me by Brahmā. But on account of your brilliant splendour, I shall hold back on the ground as much of my water as you may have in your mind." Then he mentally decided the boundary. Wishing to point it out, he took up his *śruvā* and whirled it at great speed into the briny sea. The *śruvā* went two hundred *Yojanas* in the direction of the North West, and fell down at a place which was named after it Śūrpāraka [Sopārā, dist. Thane, Maharashtra]. All the gods were surprised to see the exploit of Rāma. Thereafter Rāma gave their respective places as desired by them to the sages of purified souls." [***Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa,*** ed. J.L.Shastri, tr. G.V.Tagare., *AITM*, 33-36, 1983-1998, **2.3.57-58,** Abridged]

III

"When the night had passed, the great sage Viśvāmitra departed for the mountains of the north. King Daśaratha took his leave of Vaideha, the king of Mithilā, and quickly made ready to return to his own city and departed with his army and attendants. Suddenly a wind arose, shaking the whole earth and knocking down the lovely trees. The sun was shrouded in darkness, and it was impossible to see in any direction. Everything was covered with ash; the entire army stood stupefied. Only Vasiṣṭha and the other seers, the king and his sons remained conscious. The rest fell

senseless. In the dreadful darkness, their whole army covered with ash, they saw a dreadful-looking man as unassailable as Mount Kailās and irresistible as the fire that ends the world. Wearing a coil of matted hair, he was impossible for ordinary people to look upon, for he seemed to be blazing with some extraordinary energy. With his battle-axe slung over one shoulder and a bow—a streak of lightening it seemed—and mighty arrow in his hand, he seemed like Hara, destroyer of Tripura. Seeing this dreadful looking man, blazing like fire, Vasiṣṭha and other brahmana sages, devoted to prayer and sacrifice, gathered together and discussed the matter among themselves. 'Surely he does not intend once more to exterminate the kshatriyas in his rage over his father's murder. For long ago, he had slaughtered the kshatriyas, he was freed from his anger and grief. Surely he does not mean to exterminate them again.'

"When they had taken counsel in this fashion, the seers took welcome offerings and spoke sweet words to the dreadful Bhārgava, calling Rāma! Rāma!." The valorous Rāma Jāmdagneya accepted the homage of the seers. Then he turned to Rāma Dāśarathī and spoke: "Mighty Rāma Dāśarathī, I have heard all about your extraordinary might and how you broke the bow. It is extraordinary, almost inconceivable, that you should have broken that bow, and so, when I heard about it, I came here with yet another splendid bow. Now show me how mighty you are. Put an arrow to this bow, so dreadful to behold. If I see that you have strength enough to put an arrow to this bow, then I shall challenge you to single combat, which is praised by men of might."

"When King Daśaratha heard these words, his face fell. Filled with despair, he cupped his hand in reverence and spoke: 'Your wrath against the kshatriyas has now subsided, and you are a brahmana of great reknown. Please grant safe passage to my sons, for they are mere boys. You were born in the house of the Bhārgavas, ever engaged in Vedic studies and holy vows. Moreover, you made a promise before thousand-eyed Indra and laid your weapon down. Concerned only with righteousness; you gave the earth to Kaśyapa and retired to the forest to make your

home on Mount Mahendra. Great sage, you have come to destroy everything I have. For if Rāma is killed, none of us will survive.' Despite the fact that Daśaratha was speaking in this fashion, the valiant Jāmadagneya paid no heed to his words, but spoke directly to Rāma: 'Viśvakarman, the god of craft, skilfully wrought two divine bows—splendid, world famous, indestructible, and powerful. The one you broke, Kākustha, best of men, was the bow that destroyed the three cities when gods gave it to three-eyed Śiva, thirsting for battle. But, Kākustha, the foremost of the gods gave this, the second of those invincible bows, as powerful as Rudra's, to Viṣṇu. Rāma, here is Viṣṇu's great bow, which belonged to my father and grandfather before him. Now take it and follow the code of the kshatriyas. This arrow is a conqueror of enemy citadels. Affix it to this best of bows if you can, Kākustha. Then I shall challenge you to single combat.'

"When Dāśarathī had heard the words of Rāma Jāmadagneya, he replied, tempering his response out of respect for his father: 'Bhārgava, I have heard about the feat you accomplished. We respect it, brahmana, for you were only discharging your debt to your father. But Bhārgava, you regard me as if I were some weakling, incapable of discharging the duty of a kshatriya. Now you shall witness my strength and valour for yourself.' And so saying, Rāghava with rapid stride, angrily snatched the superb weapon and the arrow from Bhārgava's hand. Stringing the bow, Rāma fixed the arrow to the string. Then Rāma Dāśarathī addressed Rāma Jāmadagneya in wrath: 'I owe you reverence both because you are a brahmana and for the sake of Viśvāmitra. Therefore, Rāma I cannot loose this deadly arrow upon you. However, I shall destroy either your retreat or the incomparable world you have won through the power of your austerity. The choice is yours. Then, as the world stood stunned and Rāma held the great bow, Rāma Jāmadgneya, robbed of his strength, stared at Rāma Dāśarathī. Jāmadgneya was stunned to feel his strength sapped by the power of lotus-eyed Rāma and spoke to him in a voice grown very faint: "Long ago, when I gave the earth to Kaśyapa, he told me, 'You may not stay in my realm'. Therefore, Kākustha, in obedience to

my guru Kaśyapa's words I made him this promise that never again will I spend a night on the earth. Therefore, heroic Rāghava, please do not destroy my retreat. I shall go there with the speed of thought to Mahendra, best of mountains. But with this great arrow, Rāma, you may destroy the incomparable worlds that I have won through my austerities. Let there be no delay. From the way you handle the bow, I know you to be Viṣṇu, lord of the gods, and imperishable slayer of Madhu. Hail, destroyer of your foes. And so Kākustha, I need not be ashamed of being bested by You, the lord of the three worlds. And so, when Rāma Jāmadagneya had finished speaking, the majestic and valorous Rāma Dāśarathī released the great arrow. At once all the cardinal and intermediate directions were freed from darkness and Rāma still holding his weapon aloft, was praised by the god and host of seers. Lord Rāma Jāmadagneya then praised Rāma Dāśarathī after circling him reverently went back to his retreat. After Rāma had gone, Rāma Dāśarathī, calm once more gave the bow and arrow into the hands of immeasurable Varuṇa and proceeded to Ayodhayā." [***Rāmāyaṇa***, Bālakāṇḍa, sarga 73-76, trns. R.P. Goldman, pp. 263–269, Abridged]

These three narratives are examples of myths which developed around the personality of Rāma Jāmdagneya/Bhārgava Rāma or Paraśurāma (Rāma with an Axe), as he is popularly known today, but they represent the three most important streams of narratives and carry a variety of images prevalent among the diverse communities of people. In north India his most common image is that of a mythical sage who was a matricide and annihilator of a malicious king, Kārtavīrya Sahsrārjuna. He is said to have exterminated all the kshatriyas of the earth thrice seven times and ultimately lost his power at the hand of another kshatriya, Dāśarathī Rāma. In south India he is more popular as someone who forced the sea-god Varuṇa to yield a vast strip of land and created the Malabar coasts and other portions of the Western Ghats. Many people consider him to be an avatāra of Viṣṇu, as depicted in the epics and the Purāṇas and the temple architectures of the mediaeval period. He is also portrayed as a teacher of military science, a *chiraṁjīvin* or immortal person and guru of tantra in some late

medieval texts. Recently many north-Indian states, especially Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh have witnessed rise of Paraśurāma as the mascot of brahmana militancy. In many states not only many new temples of Paraśurāma are being constructed but his supposed birthday on *Akṣaya Tṛtīyā* is declared a government holiday and large brahmana congregations are organized on this occasion to improve their political influence. However, they forget that Paraśurāma was only a half brahmana since his mother, grandmother as well as great grandmother were kshatriyas. Whichever way we look at him, he is certainly one of the most puzzling personalities of Indian mythology, who has attracted the attention of several modern scholars.

Many previous studies have immensely contributed to the interpretation of these images. The most important step in this regard was initiated by F.E. Pargiter [1922] who presented some crucial observations on the traditions of the Bhṛgus, including that of Paraśurāma. Although Paraśurāma never became the subject of any detailed research in the English language, some important contributions are available in the form of a few articles, which have played a significant role in the understanding of this mythical figure. We find that at least four major articles were published between 1932 and 1937 on the Paraśurāma legends. It seems that the first systematic effort was made by Irawati Karve [1932] who not only gathered some major textual narratives related to Paraśurāma, but also paid attention to the popular and folk narratives as well as his cult status widespread among the people of the western coast. Then came a brief contribution from P. Anujan Achan [1935] who concentrated on the Vedic roots of the Paraśurāma legend as well as some narratives from the *Mahābhārata*. He also proposed that the Paraśurāma myths reflected the brhamana–kshatriya conflict in ancient India.

A landmark contribution was made by V.S. Sukthankar [1936] which was a text-historical study to identify the redactors of the *Mahābhārata*. His understanding of the Bhṛgus and Paraśurāma had a deep impact on the students of epic studies and influenced the orientation of many important studies on Viṣṇuism, which has

been discussed at several places in this work. Sukthankar made three important points: first, the *Mahābhārata* has an unusually high number of Bhārgava legends compared to other brahmana clans, in which the image of Bhārgavas is magnified to colossal proportions. Second, there is definite evidence of the tendentious "Bhṛguization" of the *Mahābhārata*. He proposed that the *Mahābhārata* must have remained for some time in the exclusive possession of the Bhārgavas as their close literary preserve, which lead to the conscious and deliberate weaving together of the Bhārata legends with the Bhārgava stories. Third, Paraśurāma is not yet a full-fledged avatāra in the *Mahābhārata*, but in order to elevate him to that rank, surreptitious efforts were being made to make the epic document his divinity.

Almost in the same period, another short article was written by Jarl Charpentier [1937], who not only identified the oldest reference to Paraśurāma in the *Buddhacharita*, but also linked the myth of creation of Konkan with the earliest attribution of avatārahood on Paraśurāma in this region. B.A. Saletore [1933, 1936] made more detailed efforts to situate Paraśurāma's land creation myth in the tradition of the western coast and emphasised the role of migration from north India in the spread of this myth. He also studied the inscriptional evidences to illustrate the antiquity and use of this legend by several rulers. In a major departure from earlier studies, K.M. Munshi [1922, 1941, 1944] made significant attempts to present Paraśurāma and Kārtavīrya as historical figures. He extended the scope of the discussion on these themes, but his views could not make much headway in academic circles. Another similar effort was made by Swami Banagovinda Parampanthi [1970,1987] who treats Paraśurāma as a historical personality. He collected several references related to Paraśurāma in the Sanskrit literary texts and Purāṇas, but he does not use the tools of historical reconstruction. However, Kumari S.S. Janaki [1966] made a substantial study of Paraśurāma myths in various Purāṇas and regional texts such as *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa, Keralamāhātmya, Keralotpatti, Paraśurāmarāmāyaṇa*, etc. which have been extensively used in this work.

The contributions of M. Biardeau [1968] and R.P. Goldman [1971, 1972] have also been significant to understand some of the dimensions of the Paraśurāma legend. Biardeau has analysed the Reṇukā decapitation myth in the light of the *Mahābhārata*, *Reṇukāmāhātmya*, and some of the Purāṇas, like *Agni* and *Bhāgavata*. Apart from that, her questions on the construction of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas, has highlighted some of the problems in this field. On the otherhand, Goldman not only undertook the study of the nature of Bhṛgu narratives in his book *Gods, Priests and Warrior* [1971], but also worked on the comparative study of Akṛtavraṇa and Śrī Kṛṣṇa versions of the Paraśurāma myth and made observations on the *paraśu* of Paraśurāma. He seems to be highly influenced by Sukthankar, but his efforts paved the way for significant inroads in the version analysis method in the studies of the epic myths. He noted that the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version ended up as an apologia for the warrior race and their right of sovereignty and perhaps developed later than the Akṛtavraṇa version.

S.A. Dange [1996] made a substantial study to understand the relationship between Reṇukā and Yellammā as well as the rise of Reṇukā as a cult figure in the southern tradition. The transformation of Reṇukā from an anthill goddess to a bodyless 'head-only goddess' popular in south India had a significant impact on the nature of the Paraśurāma cult too. In a sociological and anthropological study of Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa in Arunachal Pradesh, M.C. Behera [1998] has recorded some local variants of the Paraśurāma myth and rituals performed there. A number of scholars have made other small comments and observations related to Paraśurāma, which have been quoted at several places in this work, but they are not focused on Paraśurāma; rather, these come in the wake of other larger discussions taken up by them. Most of the studies are sketchy and limit themselves to providing accounts of various natures.

It is regretted that the only monograph available on Paraśurāma until now, written by Adalbert Gail [1977] could not be utilized properly due to my inability to comprehend the German language.

However, we have benefited from his insights given in the summary in English. Despite having several points of convergence and divergence of opinions on a range of issues, Gail hints that the Paraśurāma myth may be product of that period when the division between the priestly and warrior families had not become rigid and when the kshatriyas could perform the functions of the priests and brahmanas could occasionally took up arms. He rightly underlines that the Purāṇas avoid giving the details of Paraśurāma's victory over Kārtavīrya and the extermination of kshatriyas, because in some Vaiṣaṇava circles the main features of his legends were considered objectionable and not useful in the propagation of Viṣṇuism and the idea of *bhakti.* The Puranic redactors developed several apologies for the unbrahmanic behaviour of Paraśurāma. He has paid detail attention to the Śaiva portrayal of Paraśurāma, especially in the Purāṇas, such as *Viṣṇudharmottara*, *Brhamāṇḍa* and *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa.* Gail keeps his main focus on the Puranic literature but that narrows the scope of his study. He also suggests the priority of Puranic tradition over the *Mahābhārata* in the case of the Paraśurāma legends, which seems to be untenable.

The problematique of this study was formulated around the investigation of all three forms of religious expression, that is sacred speech, sacred act, and sacred places related to Paraśurāma. The first question to explore was how the myth of Paraśurāma developed and propagated itself across such a diversity of time and space. It also tried to raise various questions related to the authorship, patronage, usage and multiple agenda of myths in general. The second area of investigation was whether Paraśurāma attained the status of a godhead or simply remained a warrior sage of the epic mythology and, if he became a deity, then what was the nature and feature of his cult. This was a more important subject since aspects of his cult had remained a largely unexplored territory in the previous studies. The third important dimension of exploration was the social base of his myth and cult. The study wanted to ascertain whether he was revered by various castes and social segments or if he remained a brahamana hero and god unduly

promoted as an avatāra by the brahmanas of the Bhṛgu clan. Many scholars have proposed that Paraśurāma's Kārtavīrya and kshatriya annihilation narratives represent the theme of the brahmana–kshatriya conflict and an attempt to project the military prowess of brahmanas over kshatriyas in ancient India. Is it really an exclusive brahmana myth across all time and space? This question becomes more puzzling by the presence of numerous versions and shades of Paraśurāma myths in the epic and Puranic texts, which not only glorify but also denigrate him on many occasions. Paraśurāma's defeat at the hands of Bhīṣma and Dāśarathī Rāma are examples of such narratives, whose composers were also brahmanas. In fact, depiction of Paraśurāma by Tulasīdāsa, who is known to be a brahmana, is more negative than that of Vālmīki, probably a non-brahmana poet. So, can we propose that many such conflict-myths symbolise cultic tension rather than a clash of varṇas? Why do the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas accommodate narratives of conflicting and perhaps even contradictory images? To answer these questions this research had to examine the theory of Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata* propounded by Sukthankar, the doyen of epic studies and the founder-editor of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, whose basic arguments have been summarized above. A large part of this work has developed in dialogue with proponents of the theory of Bhṛguisation and explore how texts such as the *Mahābhārata* might have been expanded to incorporate the new and ever widening ambit of Puranic religion.

In order to investigate these questions, this study adopted various methods and assumptions, which must be made clear at the outset. This work goes with the proposition that myths are not a monolithic whole; rather, they are made of several smaller components. However, the exercise of locating these components is not a search for metheme as Lévi-Strauss named the minimal unit of a myth in his pursuit to discover a universal grammar of myth. We have treated it more as stratum with shifting emphasis on diverse elements of the narrative, such as the locale, event, actors, acts weapons, effects, etc. Not all the myths or components of myths in a particular cycle develop simultaneously. These

components and strata develop one after the other in a long period of succession and if we can identify the previous layer from the subsequent one, it may become a useful tool for historical enquiry.

The writing of history based on the epic and Puranic myths faces several obstacles, which further multiply due to the problems of dating Indian literary texts. Therefore, an attempt may be made to see the sequential growth of myths based on its internal components. One of the methods, which are quite prevalent in the exercise of establishing textual chronology, has been to see which particular text presumes the other text. For example, if the Vedas do not mention the Pali Piṭakas and the Piṭakas mention Vedic texts, then obviously the Vedas are earlier than the Piṭakas. Similar criteria may be adopted in the case of arranging a sequential growth pattern in a chain of mythical narrative, too. In this way, that component of narrative, which does not presume any other myth or its component, may be called the nucleus of a particular cycle of myth. Other myths may also be arranged in that sequence. However, it must be made clear that it is a category, which highlights the function and evolution of a myth and does not claim primacy of any component of the myth over others. It seems that the first myth of any cycle functions as its nucleus, on which many later myths develop as the edifice. The nucleus of a mythic cycle may be taken as the Primary myth and the edifice as the Secondary myth in order to understand the internal structures of the mythical narratives. In case of overlap of various personalities inside one mythical figure, there should be more than one nucleus or a cluster of nuclei.

The primary myth is that part of the narrative without which other elements of the tradition cannot hold together. For example, if you take the Rāvaṇa and Kaṃsa annihilation myth out of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa cycles of myth, then the entire narrative will crumble. On the other hand, even if you take the Taḍakā or Pūtanā killing myths out, it will not have much impact on their overall narratives. Thus, a primary myth confers legitimacy on other myths in that cycle. However, like any other narrative, primary myths are also subject to retouch and reinterpretation, which yields several

versions of the same myth without altering the essential narrative. The primary myth casts the dye in which subsequent stereotypes are moulded. The secondary myths attribute new exploits and deeds to the mythical figure based on his image formed due to the primary myth. It also formulates several epithets for the mythical persona and creates justificatory myths, which explains why the character behaved in the way he/she did. Sometimes it also helps to absorb myths of other cycles into its own network. But this absorption and expansion is not an arbitrary process. It is always dictated by the internal structures and, more important, an image created by the primary myth. No secondary myth can violate or ignore the image created by the primary myth. It seems that the Kārtavirya annihilation myth is the primary myth or nucleus of the Paraśurāma cycle in the same way as the Rāvaṇa and Kaṁsa annihilation myths are primary myths of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa cycles. The Kshatriya annihilation myth along with several *dāna* and *tīrtha* myths presumes the Kārtavīrya annihilation myth, therefore these may be called secondary myths of the Paraśurāma cycle, which function as the edifice of the mythical structure. This proposition may give us a viable conceptual tool to arrange myths in a sequential order of evolution, based on its internal structures and interrelationship of its constituent elements [see page no. 305].

The subtle alteration in the focus of its constituent elements generates other versions of the same myth. Different social segments create these versions to propagate and achieve their own social agenda. These versions are not useless repetitions of the same myth for a historian; rather, a comparative study of the internal structures of the multiple versions may reveal various aspects of the social history of a myth related to patrons and author of the narrative. For example, the Paraśurāma myth is available to us in two major versions known as the Akṛtavraṇa version and the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version. This study tries to explain how two different groups created and patronised these versions. However, some scholars have questioned the role of divergent versions in understanding the myth. Lévi-Strauss also discouraged the quest for the *ur* versions and said, "Our method thus eliminated a

problem which has, so far, been one of the main obstacles to the progress of mythological studies, namely, the quest for the true version, or the earlier one. On the contrary we define the myth as consisting of all its versions; or to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such ... There is no single 'true' version of which all others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth." [Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, pp. 216–218]

This notion was perhaps aimed at guarding against tendencies to determine a 'truthful' or 'original' version of the myth attempted even by some eminent scholars. For example, Sukthankar proposed: "As it is difficult, at this distance of time, in the absence of independent evidences, to say *whether Akṛtavraṇa version or Śrī Kṛṣṇa version was more truthful, it must remain a moot point whether the guilty party is Arjuna Kārtavīrya or his sons.*" [V.S. Sukthankar, *Epic Studies* VI, p. 47, emphases added] Here Sukthankar's understanding of myths becomes very clear. He was in desperate search of a true/historical version/account in order to prove the Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata*. Perhaps Sukthankar overlooked the differences between mythical and historical accounts. One is also bound to have some reservations on Lévi-Strauss's prescription as well. If his contention means that all versions have their own importance and autonomy, if it means that no hierarchy of value, importance and genuineness be assigned to different versions of the myth, it may be quite an acceptable theoretical tool. At the same time, this understanding should not lead either to denying or even trivialising any endeavour to undertake the comparative study of versions, because it helps the diachronic as well as synchronic study of the myth-cycles.

Moreover, the creation of versions was not simply an attempt to copy the master version but an enterprise to adapt a myth in one's own social context. These versions are not essentially the same myth and convey the same meaning. Myths change their meaning not through change of characters and events but through the change of emphasis on different elements, usage, focus and context of the presentation of myths. Therefore, by saying all

versions belong to the myth, one should not overlook the differences in autonomy of similar myths and versions. As Lévi-Strauss himself has emphasised, it is not symbols but the interrelationship of symbols that is important in the analysis of myths. In different versions of the same myth, the interrelationship of the "*gross constituent units*" changes to create a new meaning. Thus, both the unity and diversity of versions should be taken into account to reconstruct the history of ideas. The study of versions illuminates the steps of social history. To establish the sequential order of these versions and look for the earlier one may not be necessary for anthropological studies but it is vital for the students of history.

Apart from these, efforts are made in this work to apply some other conceptual tools to establish the sequential evolution of myths through analyses of versions and their changing components. One such proposed idea is that the negative image of a mythical personality may not precede the positive image, because such a personality has to come into prominence through an elaboration of his myth by someone sympathetic to him/her and as part of the internal tradition of that group. Although popular perception goes against this kind of position, academically it may prove a useful notion. Similarly an index of who defeats whom, who curses whom, who gives weapons to whom and what kind of weapons and on what condition, may reveal many aspects of the social dynamics of myth making. So, the first chapter is devoted to evolution and the function of Paraśurāma myths on synchronic as well as diachronic axes.

The reconstruction of the social history of myths demands understanding a myth in its entire textual and thematic context, because the same myth occurring in different contexts may reveal divergent messages. For example, miscellaneous versions of the Paraśurāma myth give varying emphases on various elements of Kārtavīrya killing and Kshatriya annihilation, depending on the context and focus of the narratives. It is apparent that the annihilation of the kshatriyas is more celebrated in those myths, which explain the origin of a caste or a *tīrtha* or sometimes

propagate the glory of Viṣṇu. Therefore, in such narratives brahmanas in general or Viṣṇu as a deity become more significant than Paraśurāma himself. It presents a picture where Paraśurāma is dethroned from the place of importance in his own myth. All those myths that propagate the extermination of kshatriyas do not necessarily propagate the glory of Paraśurāma, too. The study of the growth of Paraśurāma myths reveals that not only these myths as a whole but their small constituent elements too were manipulated and emphasised in divergent ways by different social classes and segments to justify and enhance their own social status.

These myths and legends are found in several literary sources and traditions but the *Mahābhārata* is considered the main repository of legends about the Bhārgavas in general and Paraśurāma in particular. In the *Mahābhārata* there are at least 115 references to Paraśurāma. Each of these reflects a different version and the changing nuances of the Paraśurāma's image as it developed over centuries. Apart from the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Purāṇas are also important texts where his myths could be located, especially the *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Bhāgavata*, *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and *Skanda Purāṇas* are crucial for our purposes.

As far as material archaeological remains are concerned, which are currently seen as alternative texts, volumes of Circle Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India have helped to throw light on iconography and some temples of Paraśurāma. However, despite the best of efforts, archaeological sources could not provide sufficient evidences to support the independent cultic presence of Paraśurāma, except as a part of *daśāvatāra* in numerous Viṣṇu temples. There may be two reasons for that: one, Indian archaeology has not given sufficient attention to small and lesser-known cults and has been occupied with large temples complexes for the significance of their art and architecture. But more significantly, it seems that an independent Paraśurāma cult ceased to exist among the resourceful upper classes and the devotees of the Paraśurāma cult from lower classes could not construct durable or owe inspiring monuments. The absence of such historical shrines

has been used as an argument for the late development of the Paraśurāma cult. But it must be realized that the study of temples reveals only the history of resource investment in a particular cult and not necessarily the entire history of that cult.

In this work, anthropological and ethnographic studies and reports have been used to fill the gaps existing in literary and archaeological sources. A survey of gazetteers, census reports and studies on the castes and tribes has been very useful not only in identifying many *tīrthas*, shrines and rituals associated with Paraśurāma, it has also revealed how various castes and social segments have used different aspects of Paraśurāma myths to strengthen their own social positions. Such clear-cut evidences are difficult to find in historical literature. Here it should be mentioned that for the survey of religious beliefs prevalent among various castes and tribes of south India, we have used the studies of Syed Siraj ul Hassan and Edgar Thurston. Although the Anthropological Survey of India has recently published the monumental multi-volume "*People of India*" series, this new series has also used the old census reports of the early twentieth century. Both the above mentioned reports also mainly use the same census reports. Since these reports are now around eight to nine decades old, they themselves have acquired the status of historical sources.

Now we may recapitulate some of our assumptions and formulations. First and foremost, Paraśurāma is not being presented here as a historical personality; rather an analysis is made as to how the idea of Paraśurāma was utilised by various social groups to further their own socio-political agenda. Second, not only the *Mahābhārata* but most of the Purāṇas, too, identify Paraśurāma as Rāma Jāmdagnya, Bhārgava Rāma or simply as Rāma. The first reference to this name comes from the Nallāla plates dated 522-3 CE issued by the Gaṅga king Durviniīta Koṅguṇivṛddha which describe the king as "an incarnation of Paraśurāma in the art of using astras, upāstras and other weapons". *[Mysore Archaeological Report, 1924, p. 71].* However, since the late medieval period he is mostly known and identified as Paraśurāma in the popular domain. Therefore, instead of Rāma Jāmadgnya,

Paraśurāma, which means Rāma with an axe, has been used in this work to maintain uniformity. Third, nowadays many people remember Paraśurāma as one of the seven *chiraṇjīvin*, i.e. immortal persons, along with Aśvatthāmā, Bali, Vyāsa, Hanumān, Vibhīṣaṇa, and Kṛpāchārya. All of them are connected with the epics but neither the *Rāmayaṇa* nor the *Mahābhārata* report any such list of immortals. Adalbert Gail holds that the *Mahābhārata* refers to Paraśurāma as *chiraṇjīvin* but this proposition seems unsustainable [Adalbert Gail, 1977, p. 222]. Such a list occurs for the first time only in a late medieval text called the *Nityācārapaddhati* [R.D. Karmarkar, 1946]. Moreover, this image has played no role in the majority of Paraśurāma narratives and represents a period when Paraśurāma became less popular as a deity or an avatāra and was reduced in importance to a mere brahamana sage. The re-humanisation of his divine personality [hero-god-hero] ultimately shows the decline in his status and influence. In this way we can say that the Paraśurāma myth has three developmental phases: first, associated with his rise as a hero or the killer of Kartavīrya; second, his apotheosis as an avatāra of Viṣṇu and third, his demotion to the status of a mythical sage. The *chiraṇjīvin* image is the product of this third phase of development.

In some places, the term "legend" has been used, but it should not be received as per its technical meaning, which implies a nucleus of facts around which many narratives of imaginary nature develop. It simply denotes many *ākhyānas* and *upākhyānas* produced in the epic and Puranic literature. The terms 'myth' and 'cult' have been used in their technical sense defined in the Oxford English Dictionary. We have not applied allegorical or euhemeristic approaches to the study of myth here. Neither have we treated myths as nature myths of Max Weber nor as the cosmological perspective of Mircea Eliade and shades of romantic view reflected in such ideas which explained the mythical as "historical representation of the supra-historical". These are largely "epic myths" which have been seen as part of an educational tool to make people understand the basic, authoritative models in the religious traditions. It seems that in addition to instructions epics

provide entertainment for their audience. In fact, one tends to accept Raffaele Pettazzoni's contention that epics show the first sign of a process of secularization [*The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 1987, vol.10, pp. 261–272]. Even if we do not except these myths as etiological in nature, they certainly explain the origin and causes of certain social and religious behaviour.

Last, we have not presented the Paraśurāma cult as an exclusive and insular sect, whose devotees were only dedicated to the worship of Paraśurāma. Perhaps even Viṣṇu or Śiva did not have that kind of position. People may have had preferences for a particular deity but they accommodated many other divinities in their belief systems. Certainly, Paraśurāma was not a dominant cult figure in any region; at the same time, it cannot be denied that he had a cultic following in a large part of India, specially outside the Ganga plains. One cannot claim to have studied each and every myth and *tīrtha* of Paraśurāma. However, we hope the main argument would not change by citing some new narratives and *tīrthas*.

Chapter 2

Evolution of the Nucleus

1. The Antiquity of the Paraśurāma Legends

The first question which appears before us is: how old are the Paraśurāma myths? When did they originate? Can one precisely date them? Dating a myth may prove to be a difficult exercise because a myth has its genesis in popular psyche. It spends a long gestation period in the verbal domain of the common folk and then it is organized and formalized in the literary creations of that society. It passes through several stages of transformations before being recorded in historically datable texts and archaeological evidences. Therefore, it is difficult to retrieve the early formation of a myth and one may know only about the perpetuation of myths.

The myth of Paraśurāma is no exception to these phenomena and, therefore, nothing could be said with certainty about the birth and early growth of his legends. Suddenly in the *Mahābhārata* one finds a fully developed structure of his myths, with all the paraphernalia together.[1] One reason for this is inherent in the nature of the *Mahābhārata* as a text, which has been rightly designated as a "work in progress".[2] Since the *Mahābhārata* was composed over a long period, allowing these myths to be constantly retouched and reinterpreted. The myth of Paraśurāma that are presented in the *Mahābhārata* are mature and evolved versions only, and hence locating footprints of the earlier stages of these myths become a

difficult project. The study of various elements of these myths does suggest that their origin was a product of a social setting in which the *varṇa* order as well as institution of state was still in the process of formation and therefore, may be attributed to the later Vedic period. However, we do not have any reference to indicate his presence in the Vedic literature, so there is near unanimity among scholars that Paraśurāma was a post-Vedic creation.[3] It has been suggested that since *paraśu* (axe) as a weapon was already popular in the developed Chalcolithic cultures, it is possible that the antiquity of the Paraśurāma legend might be of an earlier period. This supposition is convincing that people may have worshipped their tools and specially tools like the axe, which played an important role in prehistoric and early historic periods. Nevertheless, to say that it was also linked to a deity or a mythical person bearing that tool would need many more evidences. The axe might have been worshipped but that does not provide a sufficient basis to surmise that Rāma, the axe wielder was also worshipped. Therefore, due to the lack of evidence from pre-Vedic or Vedic sources one has to look for his origin in the post-Vedic period.

The absence of Paraśurāma in Vedic literature has been used by certain scholars to view his rise in the *Mahābhārata* as a handiwork of the brahmanas belonging to the Bhṛgu clan.[4] It should not be overlooked that not only Paraśurāma but most other cult figures of the epic-Puranic complex, have either a negligible or no presence in Vedic literature. The rise of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa is also largely confined to the post-Vedic period. In fact, a new dynamics of the myth and cult formation was at work in this period, which needs to be understood.

In Vedic literature, the name of Rāma connected with brahmanical clans appears at several places, but none of them indicate their connection either with the Bhṛgus or Jamadagni. In the *Ṛgveda* an ordinary individual called Rāma[5] is mentioned, about whom Ludwig observed that his patronymic was Māyava[6] but even that has been doubted.[7] However, Kosambi held that this Rāma of the *Ṛgveda* was a king described as an *asura* and this term is taken to mean 'powerful'.[8] Another Rāma enumerated in

the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*[9] was a descendant of Upataśvina and a teacher by profession. The *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa*[10] cites yet another Rāma, who was also a teacher and descendant of Kratujāta. However, one of the references which created immense interest in this context was that of Rāma Mārgaveya mentioned in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.*[11] Rāma Mārgaveya was learned in the sacred lore and said to be associated with the priestly clan of the Śyāparṇas, who were contemporaries of King Janamajeya. This story narrates that King Viśvantara, who was the son of Suṣadman, performed a sacrifice without the aid of the Śyāparṇas, who were his family priests until that time. Rāma Mārgaveya championed the cause of the Śyāparṇas and their right to officiate in this kings sacrifice. Therefore this story presents Rāma Mārgaveya as a hero of the Śyāparṇas.[12] The significance of this narrative lies in the dispute between a kshatriya king and a brahmanical clan for a official position and thus for a share in resources, in which this Rāma intervened.

It is noteworthy that there is a close phonetic similarity between Mārgaveya and Bhārgaveya and the name itself has been a matter of debate for a long time. Some scholars have proposed that Rāma Mārgaveya, whose clan name is otherwise unknown, may presumably be amended to Bhārgaveya.[13] Sāyaṇa has explained the name of Mārgaveya as a matronymic of Rāma,[14] but Weber[15] disputed his contention and held that it was his patronymic, deriving the name from the Mārgavas, who were an impure caste according to Manu.[16] In fact, this parentage, according to Weber became the ground for refusal by Viśvantara to appoint the Śyāparṇas as his priest. But this argument appears untenable as the *Manusmṛti* is a much later text that counts this caste of the Mārgavas among the several mixed castes of low origin. Had the same Mārgavas been an untouchable caste in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, they would not have been appointed as priest in the first place.

Przyluski has emphasized that there are other instances of interchange between *ma* and *bha* which are well attested. Therefore it is possible that Mārgaveya and Bhārgaveya might have been

connected in this way.[17] Jarl Charpentier believed that if this was a case of interchange then the form with *ma* would probably be the original one and Bhṛgu would be a later development of Mṛgu.[18] But this argument does not seem plausible because Bhṛgus were present as a distinct group of people even in the *Ṛgveda* and became very prominent along with Aṅgirāsas in the *Atharvaveda*. On the other hand, Mṛgus were not heard of before the *Manusmṛti*. Mṛgayu are mentioned in the latter Saṃhitā as lower *varṇa* people involved in hunting and included in the list of victims in the *Puruṣamedha*.[19] So, there is a very little possibility of the Mṛgus being the predecessors of the Bhṛgus. Moreover, if that was the case, it is possible that they were absorbed in the Bhṛgu clan at a fairly early time. But the peculiarity of Rāma Mārgaveya had tempted scholars like Lassen[20] to make a conjecture that this Rāma is actually Rāma Jāmadagneya.

The search for Vedic or even pre-Vedic antecedents of Paraśurāma has led many scholars to look at West Asia in general and Persia in particular. For example, Amulya Sen[21] had linked Paraśurāma with the Hittite and held him to be their king in 1700 B.C. He interpreted Jamadagni as Jamad-Agni, indicating fire-worshippers of Persia. Another scholar, J.M. Chaterjee, has argued that Jamadagni and Zarathustra/Zoroaster were identical persons, because etymologically both words have similar meaning, i.e. one who devours fire. He also suggests that Paraśurāma might have been known as Rāma of Persia because in the Vedic age Persia was referred to as the country of *Paraśu*.[22] The *Ṛgveda* in a *dānastuti* hymn mentions that they got a thousand cows in the country of *Paraśu*.[23] Another scholar, Pacoike, has suggested that the people of the tribe of Paraśurāma, who were axe-using warriors, migrated from India to Persia and named that country after themselves.[24] Both A. Padmanabhayya and A.J. Karandikar have argued in favour of locating the cradle of the Bhṛgu race in the western portion of modern Persia, to the north of Kuzistan as far as the middle of Trans-Caucasian country.[25] On the other hand, some scholars have tried to argue in favour of a pre-Aryan Indic origin of the Bhṛgus.[26]

D.D. Kosambi, too, considered that there was a presence of West Asian elements and influences in the Bhṛgu tradition. He says "....As an example, consider Bhrgus ... still one of the most prominent brahmin *gotra* group. The word has been connected etymologically with the Phrygians. These people fight on the side of Priam in the Trojan war, and have left archaeological remains that show them to have been as Aryan as any other group related to the battle axe cultures. ...one branch of the Phrygians reached India in the course of their wanderings and adopted some pre Aryans in to their priesthood, and were badly defeated in the wars at the time of King Sudās. This would account for the disappearance of the tribe as a whole, while the Bhṛgus, as priestly survivors related to other brahmins, continue to climb higher into the Indo-Aryan priesthood, making exaggerated claims that would not have been admitted without some foundation in the pre-Aryan tradition."[27] Clearly, Kosambi was not in favour of mapping the migration of the Bhṛgus from Anatolia to India, but by using the concept of adopted priesthood, he suggested the survival of West Asian cultural elements in the Bhṛgu tradition, which may have significance for the understanding of the Paraśurāma mythology.

The word 'Paraśu' had aroused much interest in scholars and it was taken to be somehow linked with the myth of Paraśurāma. For example, a word *Parasu-Mānavi* is used in a *Vṛṣkapi* hymn[28] of the *Ṛgveda*. There are a couple of other hymns too, which led scholars like Ludwig[29] and Weber[30] to believe that there was a possibility of certain West Asian and primitive Indo-Germanic element being present in the mythology of Paraśurāma. They argued that one of the hymns refers to Pṛthu Pāraśava as people with 'large ribs or with broad axes', meaning Parthians and Persians.[31]

Most of these opinions are based on mere phonetic similarities between words Paraśurāma and Persia. However, as we have already noted, almost all early references to Paraśurāma in the primary sources enumerate him as Rāma Jāmadagneya, Rāma Bhārgava or simply as Rāma. It is only in the later Puranic accounts and folk traditions that his name Paraśurāma became popular.

Therefore, it becomes a meaningless exercise to propose a migration theory on the basis of phonetic similarities of a later Puranic and folk name with pre-Vedic West Asian people. Moreover, this aspect of the Paraśurāma mythology, which attempts to connect him with the so-called pre-Vedic West Asia, is beyond the scope of this work.

As far as the earliest reference to Paraśurāma is concerned, Kumari S.S. Janaki[32] has held that it comes from the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.[33] Here Paraśurāma himself proclaims that he killed Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna and exterminated kshatriyas on twenty-one occasions and performed penance at Mt. Mahendra after donating the entire earth to the Kāśyapas. But more important, Paraśurāma appears as a miserable personality in this episode of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, who could not match the lustrous and powerful Dāśarathī Rāma. Even the greatness of Kārtavīrya is described by narrating his encounter and victory over Rāvaṇa in a later section of the text.

A careful analysis gives us an insight that this occurrence of myth cannot be the earliest reference to the Paraśurāma legend, because there cannot be any rationale behind this kind of encounter of Dāśarathī Rāma with Paraśurāma until he is thought to be a formidable counterpart. The likely logical sequence could be that first Paraśurāma becomes an important personality with many achievements to his credit, only then will his encounter with another great personality make any sense. Therefore the defeat of Paraśurāma at the hand of Dāśarathī Rāma cannot precede the rise of Paraśurāma as a great warrior in the mythical domain. In fact, this may serve as a yardstick to determine the antiquity of a mythical personality if one observes who defeats whom in successive conflicts in mythical battlefields. For example, Paraśurāma defeats Varuṇa and in turn gets defeated by Dāśarathī Rāma. This may give us a mythical order of succession in which Varuṇa comes first, followed by Paraśurāma and then Dāśarathī Rāma. This hypothesis may be tested on several other instances of Indian mythology by judicious use.[34]

Second, assumption of priority of the *Rāmāyaṇa* over the *Mahābhārata* should better give way to an overlap of the two.

Indeed, it is no less probable that the *Mahābhārata* contains many more archaic myths than the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the context of Paraśurāma, too, we have several versions of it available in the *Mahābhārata* which reflects some pattern of development and change. It has been suggested that the myth of the defeat of Paraśurāma at the hands of Dāśarathī Rāma in the *Mahābhārata* entered this text at a quite later phase, because only a couple of north-Indian manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* insert this story in the Tīrthayātrā Parva.[35] Probably this myth of defeat was first developed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition and then inserted in the *Mahābhārata,* because the Rāmopākhyāna[36] of the *Mahābhārata* does not refer to this episode at all. The meaning and the significance of this myth of defeat will be discussed in the fourth chapter at some length, but this episode of *Rāmāyaṇa* cannot be taken as the earliest reference to the Paraśurāma myth.

As far as the question of locating the earliest reference is concerned, it seems that Jarl Charpentier[37] was right in asserting that the earliest passage which can be dated with some degree of certainty comes from the *Buddhacharita* of Aśvaghoṣa.[38] It is widely accepted that Aśvaghoṣa was the contemporary of Kaṇiṣka, who could be dated around the end of the first century CE. This passage indicates that Aśvaghoṣa was completely familiar with the story of Jamadagni, Reṇukā and Jāmadagneya Rāma. It appears that around the end of the Mauryan period Paraśurāma's kshatriya annihilation myth had traveled to south India as well. And if that is true, then it may be assumed that by the time of the establishment of the Magadhan empire under Mahāpadmananda the Paraśurāma myth was present in north India, because its journey to the south might have taken a couple of centuries.

The study of south Indian sources reveals that in the trans-Vindhyan regions the focus of the Paraśurāma myths shifts from the killing of Kārtavīrya and other Kshatriyas to the land reclamation and land donation myths.[39] There are evidences which indicate that the myth and tradition of Paraśurāma was strongly associated with the migration of brahmanas and the establishment of brahmanical settlements in the far south.[40] In this context the

most valuable reference comes from Saṅgam literature which associates the celebrated brahmanical settlement of Cellur with the Paraśurāma tradition. Cellur is a village which has been identified with modern Taliparamba in Kannur district of Kerala. It has been highlighted as one of the northernmost and, therefore, possibly one of the earliest brahmanical settlements of Kerala.[41]

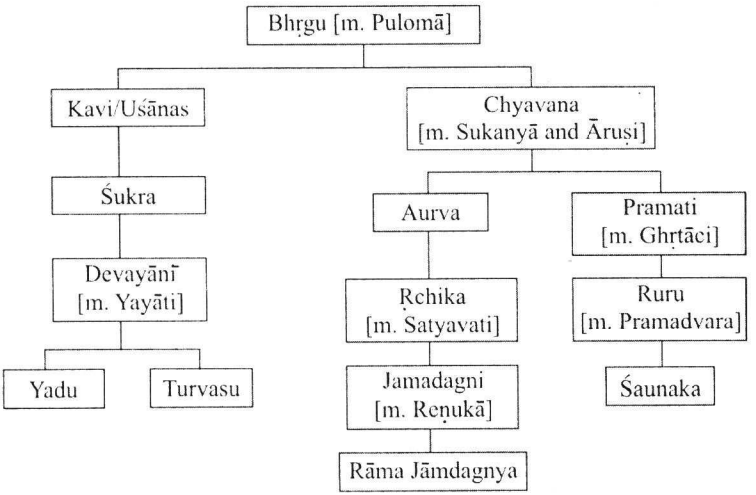
One of the love songs composed by Madaurai Marutan Iḷanākanār says: "Like the slim-waisted high pillar at Cellur—the place resplendent with the never extinguishing sacred fire—the pillar that wears round its middle the chord of the sacrifice accomplished with hard labour by that high god armed with the battle-axe which scattered the murderous elephants in the course of extirpating royal families...."[42] This indubitable reference to the myth of Paraśurāma in *Akanānūru*, which is a part of Saṅgam literature, associates Paraśurāma with the Vedic culture of Cellur and proves the existence of his legend in the era of Saṅgam.

Some other compositions associated Cellur to Kōśa warriors and the settlement like Ēḻimalai whose ruler, Nannan, is stated to be related to the Nandas of Pāṭaliputra.[43] These compositions also talk about the presence of a northern army sent by the imperial Mauryas in this region. This claim has some support from the 2nd and 13th Rock edicts of Aśoka which also refer to Kerala as "borderland". The association of this region with the Nanda dynasty of north India in the pre-Mauryan period may considerably push back the presence of the Paraśurāma legend in south India to 4th century BCE. But even if we do not accept this view, the presence of his myths and the establishment of a brahmanical settlement at Cellur in the post-Mauryan centuries, i.e. 2nd century BCE, doesn't appear to be a very presumptuous proposition. It seems that by that period, several varied components of Paraśurāma myths had also acquired a somewhat large territorial dispersal.

2. The Construction of a Genealogy

As one examines the narratives of Parasurāma in the *Mahābhārata*, one of the most striking aspect appears to be his systematic

Table 1: Genealogical Tree of the Bhṛgus in the *Mahābhārata*



[After Sukthankar]

genealogy. His lineage tree is presented in a definitive and historical manner, which shows the line of descent as Bhṛgu-Chyavana-Aurva-Ṛchika-Jamadagni-Paraśurāma in a father–son sequence. Paraśurāma's father Jamadagni is mentioned as a seer in the *Ṛgveda*.[44] But in the Vedic literature, Jamadagni is neither called a descendent of Bhṛgu[45] nor is any of his sons mentioned. Therefore, two important questions arise in this context. First, when was the genealogy of Paraśurāma formulated in a systematic and precise manner? Second, what is the authenticity of this lineage-tree? In order to understand the process one has to assess the position and mutual relationship of these mythical figures among themselves in the Vedic and subsequent literature.

The word Bhṛgu is mentioned eighteen times in the *Ṛgveda*[46] but except in one case[47] all these passages refer to the word in plural form. Even in that single *sūkta* where it is mentioned in singular, there are strong grounds for scholars to believe that it signifies all Bhṛgus collectively rather than any individual seer.[48] The *Ṛgveda* does not mention Bhṛgu as the seer of any hymn although tradition ascribes to him a couple of hymns along with

Jamadagni, Chyavana and Mathita.[49] Since he is not taken as an individual seer, none of his sons is mentioned. He is largely presented as a distant ancestor of the mythical character and an eponymous progenitor of his family. From later Vedic literature, we see the development of Bhṛgu as an individual, assigning his paternity to Varuṇa and, therefore, being called Bhṛgu Vāruṇi.[50] The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* says that Bhṛgu, Aṅgiras and Ādityas were born from the semen of Prajāpati.[51] As we move towards the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas the individual identity and myths of Bhṛgu grow in number and variety.

Chyavana,[52] the sage next in the line of descent is proclaimed to be the seer of some of the hymns of *Ṛgveda*, where throughout his name is pronounced as Chyavāna.[53] He is presented as an individual seer and a very old decrepit man whose youth was rejuvenated by the Aśvins and made acceptable to his wife.[54] Although *Sarvānukramaṇī* declares him to be a Bhārgava, the *Ṛgveda* does not mention anything to this effect anywhere in the text.[55] Even the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*[56] says that he is either a Bhṛgu or an Aṅgirasa, which makes it clear that at least till that time he had not yet been declared the son of the individual seer Bhṛgu. The myth of his miraculous birth from Puloma, the wife of Bhṛgu, appears for the first time in its full detail only in the *Mahābhārata*.[57] However, later Vedic literature clearly hints at his association with the Bhṛgu clan even if not as a son of the sage Bhṛgu.

Aurva, perhaps a descendant of Uru[58] or Urva, appears in the *Ṛgveda* closely connected with the Bhṛgus.[59] But he is a minor personality in this text. In the later Vedic literature, Aurvas are more talked of as a clan than as an individual. In one of the passages of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*,[60] the descendants of Aitaśa are called the worst of the Aurvas while the parallel version of the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa*[61] calls them the worst of the Bhṛgus. It seems therefore that the Aurvas had been a branch of the larger family of Bhṛgus.[62] In the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* two Aurvas are referred to in high esteem as authorities on the Vedas.[63] However, *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* presents Aurva as a sage in the time of Parikṣita.[64] Therefore, later Vedic literature neither portrays him as the son of

Chyavana nor attributes any great achievement to his credit. The *Mahābhārata* introduces him as the son of Chyavana through Āruṣi.[65] But in the Ādiparva of the *Mahābhārata*, where the main myth of Aurva is narrated at great length, he is not mentioned as the son of Chyavana, but as just one of the Bhārgavas.[66]

As far as Ṛchika is concerned, he does not figure either in the *Ṛgveda* or in any of the later Vedic texts. He arrives for the first time on the mythical scene in the *Mahābhārata* which weaves an elaborate narrative around his marriage to Satyavatī.[67] But the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas reveal deep confusion about his paternity and position in the lineage. At one place he is identified as the son of Urva[68] while at another as the son of Aurva[69] or even Kāvya.[70] Sometimes he is presented as Aurva himself and called as Aurva Ṛchika,[71] yet in another myth it is shown that he was born out of the thigh of Aurva.[72] This confusion about Ṛcika becomes very significant and meaningful in the background of the myth related to his role in the intermixture of brahmana and Kshatriya *varṇas* resulting in the birth of Viśvāmitra and Paraśurāma. Nevertheless, it may be noted that Ṛchika's rise to an important position in the genealogy of Bhārgava Paraśurāma has no backing in Vedic literature.

Jamadagni happens to be the most important link between Paraśurāma and the rest of the Bhṛgus. Understanding the metamorphosis of Jamadagni and his evolution as father of a warrior sage gives significant insights into the social structure of brahmanical clans. As stated earlier, although Jamadagni has been mentioned in several of the *Ṛg* Vedic *sūktas*,[73] nowhere is he referred to as a Bhārgava.[74] In fact, he is the most important *Ṛg* Vedic seer in this genealogical chain and later Vedic texts also mention him repeatedly as a great sage.[75] The second most important component of Jamadagni's delineation in the *Ṛgveda* is his closeness to Viśvāmitra, which has significant bearing on the later development of the Paraśurāma mythology. The *Ṛgveda* says that Jamadagni helped Viśvāmitra in his fight against Vasiṣṭha.[76] Perhaps this closeness between Jamadagni and Viśvāmitra became a basis of myth-making about the close family relationship between

the two most important *Ṛg* Vedic sages. It is also noteworthy that both of them lost their place together to Bhṛgu in the Puranic list of mind-born sages or a list of the most important sages. Like Chyavana, Jamadagni is also referred to as being very old [*palasti*].[77] The Jamadagnis are also mentioned as a group of people in the *Ṛgveda*, which is very significant and indicates that he was taken as the founder of a clan.[78] As Mitchiner has shown, the Vedas and the *Brāhmaṇas* do not refer to the Jāmadagnyas as descendants of Bhṛgu. Similarly, even Gautamas and Bhāradvājas are not said to be descendants of Aṅgiras. The idea of their descent from these *ṛṣis* developed in the Sūtra literature.[79]

One of the reflections of the growing importance of Bhṛgu and Aṅgiras at the cost of Jamadagni, Gotama and Bharadvāja can be seen in the changing list of the seven most important sages. The seven seers, Bhāradvājas, Kaśyapa, Gotama, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Jamadagni and Vasiṣṭha constitute a distinct group of ancient Vedic *ṛṣis*. They are regarded as the joint authors of some *Ṛg* Vedic hymns.[80] The *Saptarṣis* are mentioned four times in the *Ṛgveda*.[81] It also talks about them as seven god like *ṛṣis* who were well versed in ritual and meter, in hymns and rules.[82] Although the Sūtras maintain this list of seven great sages, when they refer to the founders of *ṛṣi gotras* this list of names changes and another set of *ṛṣis* is presented which contains the names of Bhṛgu, Aṅgiras, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Vasiṣṭha, Kaśyapa and Agastya.[83]

In the Puranas a new concept of important sages come to the fore, where the names of mind-born sons of Brahmā or *Prajāpati ṛṣis* are given.[84] This list of important sages completely changes the picture in which even Jamadagni, along with Viśvāmitra, loses his place and three of the Agastyas are included. Now the list comprises Bhṛgu, Aṅgiras, Kaśyapa, Atri, Vasiṣṭha, Pulastya and Pulaha.[85] Sometimes this list gives the names of as many as eight sages.[86] The last four become very important and in some of the lists Bhṛgu is also left out.[87] The reason for introduction of a new list of seven sages may be located in the changing social composition of dominant brahmanical groups between the period of the *Ṛgveda* and the Purāṇas. It led to rearrangement in the list

of *gotra*-founding *ṛṣis* in order to ensure the representation of the largest possible section of brahmanical clans.

It seems that the idea of the Jāmadagnyas being descendents of Bhṛgu developed only in the Sūtra literature and here they became a branch of the expanding Bhārgava clan. Even in the Vedic period, we have a reference to the expansion of the Bhṛgu clan when Gṛtasamadas joined it after their expulsion from the Aṅgiras family due to their imprisonment by asuras.[88] It seems that somehow their importance increased in the later Vedic period and traditions ascribe a large section of the second maṇḍala of the *Ṛgveda* to Gṛtsamadas. Similarly, we hear about Aurvas and Aitaśāyanas also as different sub-branches of the Bhṛgu clan. It appears that since the Bhṛgus and Aṅgirasas were expanding their clans and accepting various new people into their fold, a distant ancestor was selected to represent all of them instead of more famous ancestors of a relatively recent past of the early Vedic period and strongly associated with only one branch of the clan. Under these circumstances, long-forgotten ancestors were given a new lease of mythical life. That is how we find the development of several new myths around the personality of Bhṛgu and Aṅgira. It also explains why these two clans became important in the post-Sūtra literature. In the Sūtras, many of the *gotras* show their origin either from Bhṛgu or Aṅgiras. Therefore, on the one hand by swallowing the more important but small groups of Jāmadagnyas, Gautamas and Bhāradvājas, and on the other, allowing various new groups to join their rank, these two *gotras* became very prominent. But one of the results of this assimilation was that Jamadagni, who was considered a great sage until the composition of the *Brāhmaṇas*, lost his importance. So much so that Jamadagni, who was earlier associated with a region to the south of Vindhyas as well as with some of the northern region was now closely associated with Bhṛgukaccha and river Narmadā which were traditional areas linked with the Bhṛgus. The declining position of Jamadagni is ultimately reflected in his ouster from the post-Sūtra list of the seven most important *ṛṣis*.[89]

Another hint at the expansion processes of these two clans can be gleaned from the statement of the Sūtras that with the exception of Bhṛgu and Aṅgiras, for all other *gotras*, a wife must come from a *gotra* different from that of her husband.[90] The question arises as to why the Bhṛgus and Aṅgirasas are made an exception here. Perhaps it indicates the existence of a diverse group of people inside these clans as well as different treatment accorded to them by the rest of the brahmanic groups.[91]

Surprisingly, while Jamadagni lost his pre-eminent position as an individual seer and progenitor of a clan, the Jāmadagnyas as a group became very important in the Sūtra literature. They are listed as one of the largest *gotras* and come first in the *pravara* list. As far as the Sūtras are concerned, they became the real Bhṛgus while the Gṛtasamadas were superseded and relegated to the category of *Kevala Bhārgavas*.[92] This precisely explains why the Jāmadagnyas sacrificed the status of their progenitor Jamadagni in favour of the mythical ancestor called Bhṛgu in their larger interest. Their loss of a distinct identity was well compensated for by dominant mythical and ritual status in a larger Bhṛgu clan. This also indicates that this process of *gotra* expansion was based on accommodation and consent rather than suppression and acquisition. Perhaps this was also the reason for the dominance of the Jāmadagnya mythology in the overall fabric of Bhṛgu narratives.

In the context of this discussion, it may be noted that while the constituents of the Bhṛgu clan have a strong presence in Vedic literature, the rise of Bhṛgu as an individual sage was a new phenomenon in the post-Vedic [7th–4th centuries BCE] period when many narratives were developed around his personality. Yet V.S. Sukthankar was not fully correct in saying that the Bhārgavas were non entities in the *Ṛgveda* and suddenly became important in the *Mahābhārata*, from which he derived his theory of Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata*.[93] Many groups of people, like the Gṛtasamadas and the Jamadagnis, who later organised themselves under the umbrella of the Bhṛgu clan, were already quite visible in the early Vedic period. As their ranks swelled, they

became more and more prominent in subsequent later Vedic literature. Therefore, the rise of the Bhṛgus is inherent in the larger process of *gotra* expansion. This kind of expansion was taking place not only among the Bhṛgus alone; several other clans were also passing through a similar process. Moreover, it must again be emphasised that the rise of the Bhṛgus was not at the cost of other clans or individuals; rather, at that of smaller but prominent constituents of its own group.

The construction of this genealogy is not a completely imaginary, baseless, or false exercise. It has elements of tradition as well. In a sense, it is a blend of imagination and tradition, which arranges major ancestors and founders of sub-branches into father–son relationships. It was an ongoing process in which Chyavana and Uśānas were made the sons of Bhṛgu and Jamadagni their younger descendant, despite having no such plausible connection. These figures were significant markers and signposts of the Bhṛgu clan and, therefore, they were arranged in a father–son sequence. Paraśurāma may not have been the grandson of Bhṛgu and the son of Jamadagni, but it is difficult to doubt that he was a central mythical figure of the Jāmadagnya Bhṛgus. It is also important that after Paraśurāma, his lineage is not carried forward. He happens to be the last great Bhṛgu.

It is difficult for us to answer why Jamadagni and not anybody else was made the father of Paraśurāma. Perhaps the legend of Paraśurāma was the product of a myth-making tradition of the Jāmadagneya Bhṛgus, therefore it was logical for them to list Paraśurāma as a son of Jamadagni. It is also possible that the nomenclature of Jāmadagnya Rāma denoted that Rāma who belonged to the sub-clan of the Jamdagnis, was later interpreted as Rāma, the son of sage Jamadagni. Therefore this genealogy does not seem to be based on arbitrary factors; in fact, there is a kind of consistency in the mythical components and concepts of this lineage which helped the growth of the Paraśurāma myth. The next few pages will analyse how the genealogical and other myths of Paraśurāma were built by using many other older myths as a raw material belonging to the various branches of the Bhṛgu.

Table 2: Construction of a Genealogy

Line of Descent	*Ṛgveda*	Later Vedic Texts	*Mahābhārata*
Bhṛgu	Collective name; No individual seer; No son mentioned.	Individual Sage; Unclear paternity, Son of either Varuṇa or Prajāpati	Prominent Individual Sage
Chyavana	Individual seer; No father mentioned; No son mentioned.	Unclear paternity Either a Bhṛgu or Aṅgiras	Son of Sage Bhṛgu
Aurva/ Uru/Urva	Closely connected with the Bhṛgus; A minor personality; Paternity unclear.	The Aurvas come more as a clan than individual; Not a son of Chyavana	Son of Chyavana but seen more as a Bhārgava; Sometimes confused with Ṛchika
Ṛchika	Unknown	Unkown	Becomes prominent in the Bhṛgu lineage myth
Jamadagni	Prominent seer; Not a Bhṛgu; Close to Viśvāmitra; No father mentioned; No son mentioned; Jamadagnis also known as a group.	Founder of clan; In the Brahmaṇas Jāmadagnyas not called as Bhārgava; From Sūtra lit. onward connected with the Bhṛgu genealogy	Declared to be a son of Ṛchika; Lose earlier importance
Jāmadagnya Rāma/ Paraśurāma	Unkonwn	Unknown	Son of Jamadagni and Reṇukā Prominent hero.

3. The Mythical Roots of Paraśurāma Legends

The development of Bhṛgu genealogy was not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it was part of a larger process which was taking place in the mythological as well as real social sphere of the post-Vedic period. The brahmanic clans were also passing through a structural metamorphosis by splitting and uniting different branches of priestly orders. At the same time, they were trying to strengthen their respective positions vis-á-vis new social classes and an emerging state apparatus. The myth of Paraśurāma reflects this course of transformation and highlights the process

by which a new meaning was being given to the traditional mythology and was now being presented in the service of a new social agenda. It is a significant example of carving new mythological figures out of existing myths, characters, and images to articulate emerging aspirations and social realities. A myth is a transformation of other myths and no myth is created *ex nihilo*.[94] The legend of Paraśurāma was also not developed in a vacuum, but evolved around a nucleus of the Bhṛgu mythology in which the image of the warrior priest and anti-kshatriya components were very strong.

The warrior tradition of the Bhṛgus has been mentioned in the *Ṛgveda*, wherein they have been referred to as enemies and "forced vassals" of King Sudās.[95] The list of the opponents of the king mentions Śimyu, Turvaśa, Yakṣu, Matsya, Druhyu, Bhṛgu, Paktha, Bhalāna, Viṣāṇin and Alīna.[96] Some scholars have proposed that the appearance of the Bhṛgus along with Drahyus presents them as a historical community.[97] It has also been suggested that perhaps Turvaśa won them over to their side by offering wealth to fight against Sudās.[98] Although this conclusion seems to be highly conjectural, perhaps it is not improbable that the Bhṛgus were participants in the famous *dāśarājña yuddha*. D.D. Kosambi had used this evidence to buttress his point that Bhṛgus were not a priestly clan but a heterogeneous tribe which had many other segments and occupational groups within it. He concluded that perhaps this tribe was also badly defeated in this war at the hand of King Sudās and after the war only the priestly section of the Bhṛgus survived to perpetuate the lost glory of their tribe.[99] Whatever may be the case, it is beyond doubt that the Bhṛgus were not like other brahmanical clans who only officiated over sacrifices, but they had a warrior tradition which is clearly reflected even in the later Vedic tradition.

The references in the *Atharvaveda* is an important case in point, which mentions the Bhṛgus along with Atharvan and Aṅgirasas at several places as masters of magical incantations.[100] The Bhṛgu are also presented as protectors of the brahmanas and fighters against their kshatriya tormentors, which perhaps became the

foundation of the Paraśurāma myth. This evidence comes from a section of the *Atharvaveda* which deals with the imprecations against the oppressors of brahmanas. It says, "The gods, O King, did not give to thee this cow to eat. Do not, O prince, seek to devour the cow of the brahmanas which is unfit to be eaten.... The brahmanas have sharp arrows, are armed with missiles, the arrow which they hurl goes not in vain; pursuing him with their holy fire and their wrath, even from afar, do they pierce him.... When the king, weening himself mighty, desires to destroy the brahmana, then royal power is dissipated, where the brahmana is oppressed."[101] The basic objective of these hymns is to highlight the dangers, that arise from the oppression of the brahmanas and usurpation of their property, especially their cows, donated to them as sacrificial fee. The message is loud and clear—that the brahmanas are powerful and their property sacred and inviolable. Therefore, no one should dare challenge them.

Further, hymns of this section which directly refer to the conflict between the Bhṛgus and Sṛñjaya Vaitahavyas are quite illuminating. It is said, "They who ruled over a thousand, the Vaitahavyas, when they devoured the cow of the brahmanas perished. The cow herself, when slaughtered came down upon the Vaitahavyas, who had roasted for themselves the last she-goat of Kesaraprabandha.[102] Beyond measure they waxed strong, just fell short of touching the heavens. When they infringed upon Bhṛgu they perished, the Sṛñjaya Vaitahavyas."[103] Such references from the *Atharvaveda* make it clear that the Bhṛgus constantly nurtured some myth related to their fight with kshatriyas in general and Vaitahavyas in particular. A question arises: was this conflict between Vaitahavyas and Bhṛgus a precursor of the fight between Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma? If that indeed was the case, then the seed of the Paraśurāma myth could be located in the Atharvavedic tradition. However, to answer that question we need to ascertain the exact nature of the relationship between the Vaitahavyas and Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna. Although this seems to be a difficult exercise, there are some indications which suggest that they were part of the same stock of people. It has been viewed by some

scholars that perhaps Vītahavya of the *Atharvaveda* was similar to Haihaya king Vītahavya of the *Mahābhārata* and perhaps Vītihotra was only his second name.[104]

The Purāṇas give a genealogy which brings Vītahavya in the line of descent of Kārtavīrya. They say that Kārtavīrya's fifth son was Jayadhvaja and his son was Tālajaṅgha.[105] Tālajaṅgha had a hundred sons who were collectively called Tālajaṅghas but the eldest of them was Vītahavya. The *Mahābhārata* also mentions Vaitahavyas as members of the Haihaya family. This has led several scholars to establish a link between the legend of the *Atharvaveda* and that mentioned in the epics and the Purāṇas.[106]

K.M. Munshi has also viewed that Vītihotras or Vītahavya was the name of a tribe which was a constituent of the Haihayas.[107] He has suggested that the extent of Kārtavīrya's domain could be ascertained by the names of his immediate descendants. These are in reality either the names of the provinces, which formed a part of his empire, or the names of the different tribes which went to make up the Haihayas and Tālajaṅgha race of which he was the chief. These names are Śūrasena, Avanti, Śūra, Tālajaṅgha, Vītihotra, Śarayāta, Bhoja, Tuṇḍikera and Ānarta.[108] Moreover, *Matsya Purāṇa* tells us that Vītihotra or Vītihavya was a country to the west of the Vindhyas. This identification of Vitihotra as a country and tribe in fact solves some of the problems posed by other myths of Vītahavya.[109]

Vītahavya Aṅgiras has been mentioned in the *Ṛgveda* [110] as a king and seer of a couple of hymns, who was contemporary of king Sudās.[111] In some of the hymns he has been associated with Bhāradvājas. Since Bhāradvājas was one of the prominent Aṅgiras, as per the prevalent rule, Vītahavya received his *gotra* name from his family priest.[112] They might have been a powerful group of people who lost in some kind of conflict with the brahmanas, and that resulted in the abovementioned Atharvavedic myth of the defeat.[113] As a result of this defeat a part of this group joined the clan of Bhṛgus which is reflected in an elaborate myth of Vītahavyas' change of *varṇa*.[114] Another part merged itself with the emerging tribal conglomerate of the Haihayas. Perhaps, just

like the merger of Kurus and Pañchālas,[115] many other tribes were joining hands to forge new identities and conglomerates.[116] It appears that since Vītahavyas were now a weak force, therefore, other groups such as Haihayas and Tālajaṅghas gained an upper hand not only in the terms of geographical territory but in the mythological space as well. Geographically, Vaitahavyas were pushed to the south of the Vindhyas, and on the mythological terrain, they had to surrender their prime position to the clan of Kārtavīrya, a ruler of Narmadā. Vītahavya, who had greater mythical antiquity was now made the descendent of Kārtavīrya in the mythological genealogy of the Haihayas. Nonetheless, their myth was part of a shared tradition which ultimately resulted in the myth of the Kārtavīrya-Paraśurāma conflict. It is also noteworthy that even the Bhṛgus were amalgamating diverse groups and forming a larger identity. Therefore, what was earlier the myth of a small constituent of the clan now became the subject of an elaborate mythology of the entire clan. Moreover, the role of Aurva in supporting and nurturing Sagara, who decimated the Haihayas, also indicates that this hostility between the Bhṛgus and the Haihayas continued for a long time and ended only after the annihilation of the Haihayas at the hands of King Sagara, at least in the domain of myth making.[117]

The narrative of Aurva named *Aurvopākhāyaṇa*[118] completes the picture of the developmental stages of the Paraśurāma myth. This myth is located inside the Ādiparva-Chitrarathaparva of the *Mahābhārata*. Apart from *Aurvopākhāyaṇa*, several other narratives such as Tapati-Saṁvaran Saṁvāda, Vasiṣṭha-Viśvāmitra myth, Vasiṣṭha-Śakti-Kalmāṣpāda myth, etc. are also narrated in this section. The *Aurvopākhāyāna* occurs in the background of the sorrow of Vasiṣṭha and Parāśara at the death of the former's son and latter's father Śakti. This story is narrated by Vasiṣṭha to his grandson Parāśara to console him on his father's death, the story is narrated to inspire him with the heroic deeds of the miraculous child Aurva who wanted to avenge the killing of his father and clansmen. It is a kind of elegy and saga of a brave son combined in one.

In brief, this *ākhyāna* tells us that once upon a time there was a king called Kṛtavīrya belonging to the Haihaya clan and the Bhṛgus were their family priests. Kṛtavīrya bestowed immense wealth on his Bhṛguid priests. But after his death perhaps due to bad financial condition, his sons wanted to take that wealth back from the Bhṛgus. Some of them returned their wealth but some buried their wealth beneath the ground, which was discovered by the Haihayas. These infuriated and enraged Haihayas started slaughtering the entire Bhṛgu clan, including pregnant women with unborn children. One of these women concealed her embryo in her thigh and fled to the Himālaya. This flight was reported by another Bhṛgu woman to the Haihayas, who followed her there and wanted to kill the unborn. But as they came near that woman the child came out of the mother's thigh and blinded those kshatriyas with his lustre. The kshatriyas, now bereft of their sight, wandered in the forests and hills and then finally approached that Bhṛgu lady and begged pardon. The lady said that she was neither angry with them nor had she robbed them of their sight. However, her child, the scion of Bhṛgus was certainly angry with them due to the massacre of his kinsmen. Therefore, only he could restore their eyesight. Then those Haihayas prayed to the child and he forgave them at that time. But he did not forget that outrage and started performing austerities to destroy the entire world. By the intensity of his austerities, he afflicted the entire world. On learning about that, the *pitṛs* or "shadows of his ancestors" appeared and said to him that he sould control his anger and forgive these people. They advised him to discharge the heat of his anger into the ocean. That anger took the form of marine fire and the horse-head of Hayaśirṣa and the world was saved from disaster.The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* also refers to this myth of Aurva and origin of marine fire.[119]

This myth is significant from many points of view. First, here Aurva is not mentioned as son of Chyavana. Instead, he is simply a son of a Bhṛgu lady. Second, despite having so many close similarities with the Paraśurāma myth, no apparent linkage is shown with him in this narrative. Although the annihilation of the

Haihayas which Aurva wanted to accomplish was later completed and achieved by his great-grandson Paraśurāma, even then the absence of the reference gives a strong reason to believe that the myth of Aurva was perhaps developed prior to the creation of the Paraśurāma legend. Since this myth does not mention either Chyavana as the father or Paraśurāma as the grandson, it looks that it belonged to a period in which the rigid Bhṛgu genealogy had not been constructed yet. Could this locale, therefore, represent a crucial link between Bhṛgu-Vaitahavya conflict myth of *Atharvaveda* on the one hand and Paraśurāma-Kārtavīrya conflict myth of the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas on the other?

There appears to be a three-stage development of the Paraśurāma myth. In the first stage, the conflict is depicted between two communities [Vaitahavyas and Bhṛgus] and not between two individuals. In the second, the showdown takes place between a community [Haihayas] and an individual [miraculous child Aurva]. And finally, the decisive battle takes place between two individuals, Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma, but significantly, the two warring sides remain same, viz. the Haihayas and the Bhṛgus. The transformation of conflict between two communities into a conflict of individuals may perhaps be explained in terms of the changing nature of social and political institutions from the later Vedic to the post-Vedic period. The disintegration of tribe- and clan-based identities and the rise of territorial states, monarchies and professional armies equipped with developed arms, might have lead to this metamorphosis. Significantly, however, the cause of this conflict remains the same, viz. grain, money and wealth, and its forceful appropriation. While in the first two stages Bhṛgus use the power of austerities to challenge the might of the warriors, in the third stage retaliation is through weapons and war.

Some of the elements of the Aurva myth were later appropriated by the myth of Paraśurāma. The more important question here is: why could the myth of Aurva not be developed to project him as the saviour of the Bhṛgus and annihilator of the Haihayas? This might have been due to three possibilities, which may have operated separately or in combination. The first and

foremost possibility is that although Aurva had some kind of Vedic antecedents and represented a particular branch of the Bhṛgu clan, some of the Aurvas, such as the Aitaśāyanas had lost their social status in the later Vedic period. Therefore, the group of people who created the Aurva myth were marginalised in social respectability, and along with them, their myth was also pushed to the periphery. In comparison to him, Paraśurāma was a new creation who did not possess any baggage of the past, consequently he could be a more acceptable personality to represent the diverse branches of the Bhṛgu clan.

The second reason could be that the Aurva myth is similar to many other brahmanical myths where cursing and destruction of kshatriyas by brahmanas takes place through their power of austerities and not one of them challenges a warrior clan through the power of weapons. Therefore, Aurva could not be developed as a distinctive saviour of the Bhṛgus and annihilator of the kshatriyas. On the other hand, the deeds of Paraśurāma caught the imagination of the myth-makers and completely overwhelmed the psychic horizons of the Bhṛgus. Why are his myths so different from other brahmanical narratives? Perhaps Paraśurāma was a real person or a hero who challenged the authority of an oppressive king in the later or post-Vedic period. Subsequently, his deeds were greatly exaggerated and presented Paraśurāma as a deified icon of resistance. Hence, at least theoretically, the myth of Paraśurāma may contain some elements of historical truth, which made it different from other brahmanical myths.[120]

Table 3: Three stage evolution of Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya myth

First stage	*Atharvaveda* V.18.10	Community vs. Community	Vaitahavyas vs. Bhṛgus
Second stage	*Mahābhārata* CE.1.169–171	Community vs. Individual	Vaitahavyas vs. Aurva
Third stage	*Mahābhārata* CE.3.115–117	Individual vs. Individual	Kārtavīrya vs. Paraśurāma

The third important likelihood may be that the myth of Aurva exhausted its scope of growth completely due to its very structure and perhaps that is why no other version of this myth is found anywhere. A study of Indian mythology suggests that on the mythical plane, it is important for a miraculous child to grow into a warrior hero, in order to acquire the status of a cult figure or avatāra. It seems that action through arms and weapons caught the fancy of people more than action through mantra. Moreover, only those individuals get a place in the divine pantheon who have destroyed some kind of evil force, either a tyrannical king or a demon. Interestingly, Aurva did not carry out his threat of annihilation and stopped in the middle of his avowed task of destruction.

Notwithstanding the above considerations, there were at least three attempts by myth-makers to associate Aurva with the destruction of the Haihayas. The first attempt to take revenge and inflict injury on the Haihayas was only partly carried out and quickly withdrawn. His myth narrates that Aurva first blinds the Haihayas but soon forgives them and returns their eyesight. But he could not forget the injustice committed by them towards his clan and performed a penance to destroy them. However, he could not carry out the threat this time too as he was stopped midway by the appearance of *pitṛs*. And last, Aurva is made the saviour of King Sagara, who ultimately annihilated the Haihayas completely.

Why does Aurva stop in the middle of his vow? There are two possibilities. Either his mythmakers did not posses sufficient courage to take their myth to its logical conclusion, or they were trying to emphasise the virtue of conquering one's anger and shunning violence. This message has special significance in the background of Rākṣas Satra being organised by Parāśara to avenge the killing of his father. Whatever be the reason, this kind of portrayal could not have helped in projecting Aurva as a protector of the social order. Therefore, we find that the Aurva myth was "structurally deficient" and there was no scope for its growth. Nevertheless, it had certain elements and aspirations of a group of people that was later appropriated and used by the makers of the

Paraśurāma myth. One of the most important similarities between the myths of Aurva and Paraśurāma is reflected in the fact that both had conflicts with descendants of Kṛtavīrya. In the case of Paraśurāma, it is further specified as a conflict with the son of Kṛtavīrya, i.e. Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna. Similarly, some other symbolisms, such as the appearance of the *pitṛs* to prevent Aurva from carrying out destruction are repeated in the context of Paraśurāma. It is significant to note that Paraśurāma was also stopped halfway by the sudden appearance of the *pitṛs,* but by that time he had already annihilated the Haihayas and a large part of the kshatriya clans. This is the most striking similarity, which was perhaps borrowed from the Aurva myth.

Apart from these apparent similarities there is a minute and subtle relationship between these two myths which is reflected in the inversion of motifs. While in the Aurva myth the Bhṛgus are slaughtered completely, not sparing even the unborn and the embryos, in the Paraśurāma myth the same kind of violence is suffered by the Haihayas and other kshatriyas. This inversion of revenge and violence completes the mythical cycle, as explained by Lévi-Strauss.[121] Therefore, a study of the Aurva myth explains how the myth of Paraśurāma was intricately linked with brahmanical myths in general and the Bhṛgu myths in particular.

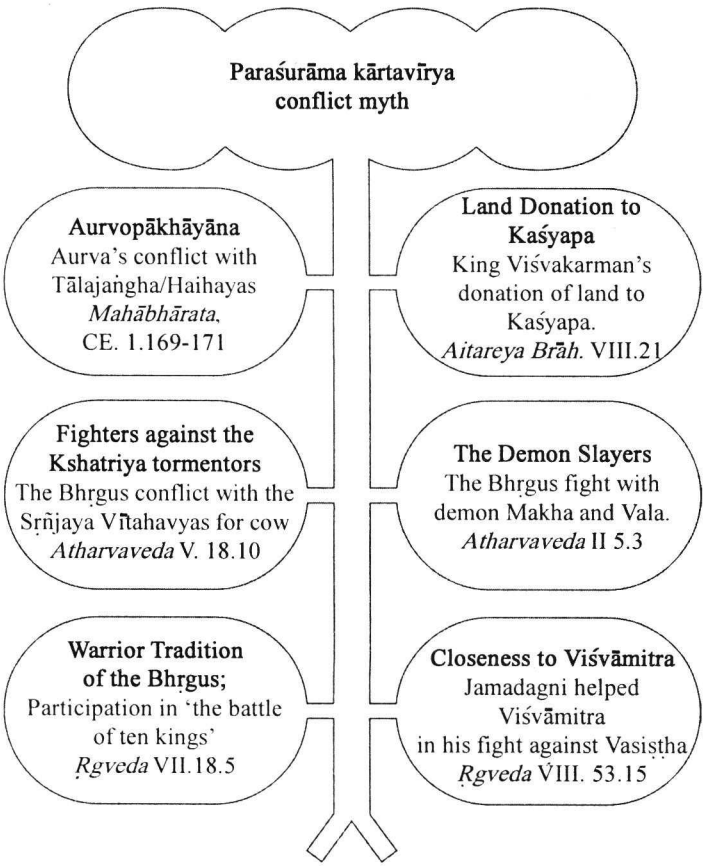
Just like Aurva, the myths and legends of Jamadagni has also contributed significantly to the Paraśurāma myth. It has been mentioned that Jamadagni had a close relationship with Viśvāmitra even in the *Ṛgveda* [122] and later this old myth of relationship was used to create a new myth of *Charu* exchange by Satyavatī[123] and his mother. This narrative tried to explain why Viśvāmitra became a sage despite being a kshatriya and Paraśurāma a warrior despite having been born in a brahmanical clan [see introduction]. In this way, Viśvāmitra is made the maternal uncle of Paraśurāma. Similarly, Jamadagni's association with the cow has also served a crucial role in this narrative. In the *Ṛgveda,* Jamadagni eulogises a cow and exhorts the people not to kill her.[124] Perhaps that Ṛgvedic reference was used and elaborated in the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya conflict myth, which actually centred on the cow of Jamadagni.

It seems that some other Bhṛgu myths recorded in the Vedic literature played a role in the elaboration of the Paraśurāma mythology. For example, the Karṇa Parva of the *Mahābhārata* narrates the story of Paraśurāma's war with some demons.[125] It is true that this section is mainly aimed at enhancing the prestige of Lord Śiva, who gave him power to fight with those demons. But interestingly some Vedic myths also discuss the myth of the conflict between the Bhṛgus and the demons. Bhṛgus are said to have driven off Makha[126] and this episode is repeated in the *Sāmaveda*, too.[127] Similarly, *Atharvaveda* also tells us that the Bhṛgus killed a demon called Vala,[128] although in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛgveda* it is said that Aṅgirasas destroyed an asura named Bala.[129] Therefore, it appears that Paraśurāma became a focal point of Bhṛgu mythology and several of the earlier myths were made part of his personality and depicted as his achievements.

Finally, one may conclude this discussion on the mythical roots of the Paraśurāma legend by raising the question regarding the number of times Paraśurāma annihilated the kshatriyas. It is said that he exterminated the kshatriyas of the earth twenty-one times. However, what is the significance of the number twenty-one? If one believes that redaction of the *Mahābhārata* and the making of the Paraśurāma myth were closely related, as has been proposed by V.S. Sukthankar, then Paraśurāma should have annihilated the kshatriyas eighteen times and not twenty-one times, as the number eighteen seems to be more important in this epic. One of the clues may be found in the *Ṛgveda* itself. It is significant to note that King Sudās, who was supported by Indra in his *dāśrājña yuddha*, fought not only against ten kings but a total of twenty-one tribes.[130] It must be remembered here that Bhṛgus were also part of this battle and fought against King Sudās. They were part of the defeated side and probably the defeat of twenty-one kings/tribes became the symbol of ultimate victory in their collective psyche. Therefore, while elaborating upon the Paraśurāma myth, this number became significant for them.

It is also quite possible that in its early stage the Bhṛgus did not emphasise the killing of all kshatriyas of the earth twenty-one

Table 4: The mythical roots of Paraśurāma legends


Paraśurāma kārtavīrya conflict myth
Aurvopākhāyāna
Aurva's conflict with Tālajaṅgha/Haihayas
Mahābhārata, CE. 1.169-171
Land Donation to Kaśyapa
King Viśvakarman's donation of land to Kaśyapa.
Aitareya Brāh. VIII.21
Fighters against the Kshatriya tormentors
The Bhṛgus conflict with the Sṛñjaya Vītahavyas for cow
Atharvaveda V. 18.10
The Demon Slayers
The Bhṛgus fight with demon Makha and Vala.
Atharvaveda II 5.3
Warrior Tradition of the Bhṛgus;
Participation in 'the battle of ten kings'
Ṛgveda VII.18.5
Closeness to Viśvāmitra
Jamadagni helped Viśvāmitra in his fight against Vasiṣṭha
Ṛgveda VIII. 53.15

times; rather, it might have been associated with the defeat of twenty-one tribes/chiefs along with Haihayas/Kārtavīrya. This possibility looks quite plausible in the given background. But later, this narrative was twisted to convey the message of annihilation of the entire kshatriya race twenty-one times. Through this twist of narrative, a personalised conflict between two individuals/clans was turned into a communal/*varṇa* conflict between brahmanas and kshatriyas. It is possible that brahmanas of other clans were responsible for this kind of reshaping in order to share the achievements of this mythical figure. In fact, one finds at least

four types of responses from brahmanical clans in the context of the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya myth, the discussion of which follows. It is also interesting to note that Paraśurāma also performed a sacrifice for Indra after the annihilation of the kings, and, like Viśvakarman Bhauvana, donated the entire earth to Kāśyapas as narrated by the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. The earth donation myth will also be discussed *in extenso* in a subsequent section.

4. The Nucleus: The Kārtavīrya Annihilation Myth

The rise of Jāmadagnya Rāma as a formidable hero and later as an avatāra and popular cult figure owes substantially to his myth associated with the slaying of Kārtavīrya Sahasārajuna. In fact, this myth seems to be so central to the entire network of the Paraśurāma mythology that most of his other myths which developed around his image of the greatest warrior, the best teacher of military science, his sin-destroying penance, sacrifice, donation of the earth, pilgrimage etc. presumes this big achievement on the mythical terrain.

The Kārtavīrya-killing myth defined the basic contours of Paraśurāma's entire *charita*. It served the role of a nucleus, whose analysis is most crucial to understand the development and expansion of the Paraśurāma myth. For example, the main consideration of those myths which are woven around the lineage of Paraśurāma are also primarily derived from the Kārtavīrya-killing myth. The lineage myth addresses the question as to how Paraśurāma, despite being a brahmana, could become such a ferocious warrior, who not only defeated a great king like Kārtavīrya but also decimated the entire kshatriya race twenty-one times. The answer is supplied through the construction of another myth, in which the mechanism of *Charu* exchange by Satyavatī and her mother is employed. The result was the birth of a brahmana-like kshatriya, i.e. Viśvāmitra, and kshatriya-like brahmana, i.e. Paraśurāma. Similarly, myths related to land creation and his being the guru of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and Karṇa also depend on his image of a great warrior shaped by the Kārtavīrya-killing myth.

The Kārtavīrya-killing myth seems to be the oldest and the first myth developed around the personality of Paraśurāma. Here it should be made clear that by oldest we do not mean that it is the purest, unadulterated and primordial strata of its mythical structure. Even a casual reading of the epics and Purāṇas reveals that all texts are constantly retouched and 'updated' by the redactors over centuries and the Kartavīrya-killing myth was no exception to this trend. The rereading of text has resulted not only in the creation of numerous minute differences in their narrative of apparently similar accounts, but has also added many new myths in order to explain and justify the core narrative. Therefore, not only have several versions of this myth been created over a long duration of time, many new achievements have also been attributed to this warrior ascetic.

The Kārtavīrya-annihilation myth is available to us in many versions. Two of the most important versions are the so-called the Akṛtavraṇa version in the Āraṇyakaparva and the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version in the Śāntiparva of the *Mahābhārata.* Apart from these, many of the Purāṇas such as the *Viṣṇudharmottara, Brahmavaivartta, Brahama, Padma, Viṣṇu, Vāyu, Bhāgavata, Matsya,* and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* give various other versions of this myth. The Akṛtavraṇa version gives the most sympathetic treatment to the personality of Praśurāma and provides a picture from the Bhṛgu perspective. Other versions reflect a different emphasis on the elements of the myth, suggesting redaction by other interest groups. For example, the Akṛtavraṇa version gives an important place to *vilāpa* (lamentation) of Paraśurāma after he found that his father had been killed by the sons of Kārtavīrya. This lamentation helps to present Paraśurāma as an aggrieved son and enhances his emotional appeal. However, no other version gives any significant place to this theme. In contrast, the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version, which is perhaps the second most important version of this legend, not only misses the discription of *vilāpa* but also presents Kārtavīrya as an innocent king. This version portrays Bhārgava Rāma as an arrogant and cruel person who punished the king for a crime committed not by him but his sons, and in return the king's sons killed the

father of Paraśurāma, which appears justified. In addition to this, another myth is grafted upon it, in which Āpava Vasiṣṭha curses Kārtavīrya that he will be killed by Paraśurāma. Therefore, the credit for the destruction of Kārtavīrya is given to a Vasiṣṭha, and Paraśurāma functions as a mere agent for the enforcement of the curse.

The enhancement of the status of Kārtavīrya and Vasiṣṭha goes together with the substantial deterioration in the position of Paraśurāma and creation of a negative image around him. Now one may ask which version may have developed first, the one portraying a positive image or the other depicting negative disposition? It appears that a negative representation cannot precede the positive image or presentation of a mythical personality, the reason being that the community to which the protagonist belongs, undertakes the first elaboration of a myth and they present it from their own perspective and aspiration. Since Paraśurāma is shown as the victorious party in all the versions of this myth, the version most sympathetic to him should contain the oldest elements of the myth. Thus, the Akṛtavraṇa version may be accepted as containing the elements of the earliest existing version on this count. However, it must be added here that this version also contains many such elements, which could not have been associated with this myth during its inception. For example, some hints at Paraśurāma's being an *avatāra* as found in the Akṛtavraṇa version must have been a product of subsequent retouching and addition. The image of a hero must precede his becoming an avatāra. For the same reason, it is difficult to accept Adelbert Gail's proposition which "pleads for the priority of the Puranic tradition" over the *Mahābhārata* and holds the view that "the first great Rāma legend is found in *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*".[131] The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* does not even mention any fight between Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma. Other Purāṇas also do not give importance to the Kārtavirya-annihilation myth and provide several kind of apologies to the myth of extermination of kshatriyas through his portrayal as avatāra of Viṣṇu or *bhakta* of Śiva. Therefore, they cannot be prior to the *Mahābhārata*

narratives which are centred on the heroic deeds of Paraśurāma. Some of the *Mahābhārata* narratives have a Puranic tone and tenor, but even those narratives may be situated in a period between the epic and Purāṇas and not after the full blooming of the Purāṇas.

5. The Components and Structure of the Nucleus

The components and structure of all these versions are not the same, as they change from text to text according to the agenda of the redactor. Therefore, it is a kind of shifting and changing structure through selection of some elements out of the corpus. The only things, that remain the same are the characters and the result of the conflict. However, the 'why', 'how' and 'when' of this conflict keep changing. Therefore, unity and diversity of structure have to be understood through a comparative study of different versions.

Geography of the Myth

The first thing that draws one's attention here is the changing geographical location of the myth. This myth is located in two theatres, namely, the Jamadagni ashram and the kingdom of Kārtavīrya, although the Āraṇyakaparva[132] does not mention either name of the river in which Reṇukā went to take a bath, nor does it specify the location of the Jamadagni ashram. The Śāntiparva[133] also does not talk about it. But some of the Purāṇas do mention the river. For example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[134] says that Reṇukā went to fetch water from the Gaṅgā. The *Padma Purāṇa* also narrates that sage Jamadagni remained on the auspicious bank of the river Gaṅgā.[135]. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* shifts the theatre of action from the Gaṅgā to the Narmadā and categorically states that the hermitage of the noble-souled sage Jamadagni was situated on the bank of river Narmadā.[136]

In contrast to the locale of the Jamadagni ashram, the area of activity of Kārtavīrya is unanimously stated to be on the banks of the Narmadā. Altough both the important versions of the Paraśurāma myth found in the *Mahābhārata* lack any direct

reference to Narmadā or any adjacent area, the Purāṇas clearly state that Kārtavīrya was a powerful ruler whose kingdom was on the banks of the river Narmada.[137] This indicates that by the post-Gupta period Paraśurāma-Kārtavīrya myth had become more entrenched in central and south India.

The Āraṇyakaparva states that Kārtavīrya was the king of Anūpa *deśa*.[138] Śāntiparva does not mention the kingdom of Kārtavīrya and he is simply a Haihaya king.[139] Most of the Purāṇas mention that Kārtavīrya captured the capital of the Nāga kingdom and founded the city of Mahiṣmatī.[140] It has also been argued that Anūpa literally means 'a place near the sea' or 'a marshy land' and it was used as a designation for various areas near the sea.[141] But K.M. Munshi has held that Anūpa was specifically used for a tract between the Mahi and Tapti rivers near Broach, which was the core region of the Haihaya kingdom of Kārtavīrya Arjuna. Therefore, Anūpa was the other name for the Gujarat and Kathiawad region.[142] Anyhow, the use of the name of Anūpa is completely discarded in all the Purāṇas. The Āraṇaykaparva alone alludes to it.

There have been some attempts to identify the historical location of Mahiṣmatī in order to establish the historicity of Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma. One such major archaeological effort did not succeed. The excavation of Maheshwar [so-called ancient Mahiṣmatī] could not unfold the mysteries of the great Haihaya monarch Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna.[143] However, while we do not have any pre-modern shrine dedicated to Paraśurāma or Reṇukā in Madhya Pradesh, there are references to the temple of Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna.[144] Therefore, this geographical shift in the myth may have been associated with some kind of popular perception about the traditional linkages of the Narmada region with the Haihaya and Kārtavīrya for a very long time.

Did Kārtavīrya come to Jamadagni Ashram?

Coming to the main storyline of the myth, this is the first important question where variations in some of the accounts occur. Although the Āraṇayaka version clearly states that one day the king of Anūpa

came to Jamadagni ashram along with his whole entourage but the Śāntiparva completely denies it. It says that he was a powerful and righteous king who administered his empire dutifully and gave a lot of *dāna* to brahmanas. It's only the cruel sons of the king who came to the ashram one day and took away the calf of the sacrificial cow of Jamadagni. Kārtavīrya was not aware of this.

But most of the Purāṇas narrate that Kārtavīrya visited the hermitage of Jamadagni. For example, the *Padma Purāṇa*[145] says that "some time the king, the lord of the Haihayas, surround by his entire army, having conquered all countries reached the hermitage of Jamadagni." Similarly, the *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*[146] says that once the illustrious Kārtavīrya had been to the hermitage of Jamadagni with his four fold army. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[147] says: "On one occasion, while Arjuna was on hunting expedition in an impassable forest he perchance happened to come to the precincts of the hermitage of the sage Jamadagni." The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[148] devotes enormous space to describe this in an ornate literary style. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* does not narrate any event of Kārtavīrya's visiting the hermitage of Jamadagni, therefore none of these issues find any mention in this text. Even the *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, *Matsya* and *Brahma* Purāṇas do not talk about this episode at all because they incorporate a different kind of narrative and reference of this myth. Therefore, it is obvious that the Śāntiparva version makes an extraordinary effort to absolve Kārtavīrya from any kind of crime. Nevertheless, other redactors could not accept that kind of extreme position.

How did Kārtavīrya behave with Jamadagni?

The Āraṇyaka version of the *Mahābhārata* says that the king was intoxicated with the pride and arrogance of his prowess in war and military might. Therefore, he did not receive the hospitality respectfully offered by Reṇukā. Instead, he destroyed the ashram and took away the calf of the sacrificial cow. But the Śāntiparva does not recount this point because the king is not shown to have visited the ashram at all.

In the Purāṇas a major shift takes place regarding the behaviour of Kārtavīrya with Jamadagni. First, Reṇukā is not shown as offering any hospitality. Almost all descriptions in the Purāṇas talk about the cordial meeting of Jamadagni and Kārtavīrya. The *Padma Purāṇa*[149] narrates that "seeing the best glorious sage, he [Kārtavīrya] saluted him. The king, having asked the devout great sage about his well-being, gave him garments and ornaments. He [Jamadagni], too, honoured the king that had come to his hermitage. Having honoured according to the precepts the king with *madhuparka,* the sage fed the best king along with his army." Therefore very cordial behaviour is delineated which turns sour only on the issue of the cow. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[150] makes a very clear statement: "The king approached the noble sage and bowed down to him. ...Jamadagni duely honoured the excellent king. ...the king who was extremely pleased with him addressed Jamadagni— O great sage, grant me permission. I shall go to my city ...". Then, on the request of the sage the king accepted to be his guest for the night. The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* also says the king respectfully bowed to the saint bright like the sun who blessed him in return.[151]

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,*[152] however, is closer to the Āraṇyaka version where Kārtavīrya is shown as an arrogant and proud king which is quite different from the image one finds in the *Padma* or the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.* The *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*[153] does not talk about respectful behaviour of the king towards the sage and mostly narrates the way Jamadagni offered luxurious hospitality to the king and his army. There is no sign of the initial exchange of pleasantries as is found in the Āraṇyakaparva version. The *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* also depicts the greed for the divine cow which created the hostility between the two.

The question of the cow and the calf

The image and status of the cow also changes from the *Mahābhārata* to the Purāṇas. In the Āraṇayakaparva[154], Jamadagni's cow is not attributed any divine character; rather, it is a simple sacrificial cow, whose calf is taken away by Kārtavīrya

Sahasrārjuna. Therefore, in this context two major differences occur. One was the miraculous nature of the sacrificial cow, and the second was the perpetrator of the misdeed which is shown to be Kārtavīrya in one account and his sons in the other. The Śāntiparva[155] version also says that the calf was taken away by the sons of the king and Kārtavīrya did not know anything about it. Unlike in the Purāṇas, here the cow or calf is not attributed any divine character such as the power to fulfill wishes and association with Indra. It is only in the Purāṇas that the shift takes place in the direction of declaring the cow to be divine and miraculous. For example, the *Padma Purāṇa*[156] elaborately narrates that Jamadagni practised penance in the honour of Indra for a thousand years and when Indra wished to grant him a boon, Jamadagni begged for Surabhi, the cow that always fulfilled desires. Indra granted him the boon and Jamadagni, "having obtained Surabhi lived with great grandeur like another Indra". In fact, the *Padma Purāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*[157] devote many ślokas to this theme to emphasize that the conflict between Paraśurāma/Jamadagni and Kārtavīrya was on the question of the divine cow, which became the main focus of the story. Jamadagni procures inexhaustible food, drink and other items of luxury due to Surabhi/Kapilā. The king begged for the cow which was refused by Jamadagni on the ground that it is a gift that could not be given away. The sage said, "O King, how should the wealth of deities be given by me?" The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* says "How can a brahmana make a gift to a kshatriya? Lord Kṛṣṇa had given this cow to Brahmā in the Gōloka. Brahmā gave it to his son Bhṛgu who gave her to me. I can never give her to you."[158] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* takes this myth very close to the Vasiṣṭha myth and describes how a several-million army came out of cow's body, who fought the army of Kārtavīrya. The *Padma Purāṇa* states that the cow became angry and fought the army of Haihayas with its horns and hooves and then vanished in a moment and reached Indra. Therefore, both these versions introduced a new angle in this myth where an ordinary cow becomes a divine and wish-fulfilling cow but could not be carried away by Kārtavīrya, as is shown in many other versions.[159]

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[160] names this cow Kāmadhenu, with whose grace the sage offered unparalleled hospitality. But this version differs from the *Padma Purāṇa* version in the sense that it says that both the cow and calf were taken away by Kārtavīrya to Mahiṣmatī. Rāma, after killing Kārtavīrya and his sons, restored the cow along with the calf to his father. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[161] does not call this cow Kāmadhneu or Surabhi but depicts it in the same light. Thus the cow in this Purāṇa also fulfills wishes and provides all the luxury offered to the king and when the king's minister Chandragupta tries to take away the cow forcibly, it attacks the army with its horns and hooves.[162] The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* says, "After routing all the servants quickly the sacred cow *payasvinī* went up to the sky, even as all living beings remained looking on."[163] The soldiers went away with the calf only.

In the light of these observations, it is not difficult to see that the myth of the confiscation of the cow, a prominent element in the Vasiṣṭha–Viśvāmitra myth, was not copied or grafted upon the Jamadagni–Kārtavīrya conflict myth in the *Mahābhārata*, as argued by Sukthankar.[164] In the *Mahābhārata* the cow is not miraculous as Vasiṣṭha's cow. Second, the cow does not fight back and produce warriors of different origins. Third, while in the Vasiṣṭha myth the king surrenders before brahmanic power, here the king ultimately takes away the calf of the sage. It is only in the Purāṇas that these two myths are brought closer to each other. There is also a possibility that the Vasiṣṭhas themselves were involved in bringing these two myths closer, because in many of the myths of Paraśurāma, Vasiṣṭhas somehow play an important role. They have acquired importance in the Śāntiparva by inserting the Āpava Vasiṣṭha myth of curse to Kārtavīrya and this was followed by many other Purāṇas. Incidentally, the narrator of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[165] is also Vasiṣṭha. This Purāṇa also adds the myth of Āpava Vasiṣṭha's curse to Kārtavīrya.

Who took the Cow/Calf away?

This question has a serious bearing on the image of Kārtavīrya. In the Āraṇyaka version,[166] Kārtavīrya himself takes away the calf

of the *homadhenu*. In the Śāntiparva[167] the blame is shifted to the wicked sons of Kārtavīrya and the king is not even aware of the occurance. However, the Purāṇas do not talk about his sons being responsible and hold the king responsible in some manner. The *Padma Purāṇa*[168] says that the king first of all begged for the Surabhi and when Jamadagni refused to give it away, because it was the property of Indra, Kārtavīrya himself tried to forcibly take the cow away but the cow vanished in the sky. So it does not mention that the king went away even with calf.[169] The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[170] says that out of arrogance and pride, Kārtavīrya commanded his men to take away the sage's cow of plenty and they forcibly carried off the screaming cow and her wailing calf to Mahiṣmatī. In the *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*,[171] the minister asks for the permission of the king and says, "If you like, I will fetch it. O King, I am only waiting for your orders," and the king said: "Let it be so."

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[172] also has a similar narrative where a long dialogue between the king and his priest and minister Chandragupta is introduced on the subject and they discuss whether the cow should be taken away or not. The family priest advises against the move but the minister convinces the king that this cow is a jewel and, therefore, should only be possessed by the king himself. He also argues that if the king does not want to take away the cow forcibly, then the sage might be compensated with thousands of ordinary cows, gold, etc. The king prefers the latter course, i.e. to get the cow in lieu of proper compensation. The king clearly says, "The property of a brahmana should not be taken away".[173] Therefore, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* entirely shifts the blame on the minister Chandragupta. In this respect the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* somehow comes closer to the Śāntiparva version, which is not very sympathetic to Paraśurāma.

Who Killed Jamadagni?

The Āraṇyaka[174] version of the *Mahābhārata* gives an account in which Kārtavīrya's sons were responsible for the killing of Jamadagni. The sons went to the ashram in the absence of

Paraśurāma and avenged the killing of their father Kārtavīrya. Even the Śāntiparva version agrees on this point. But in the Purāṇas, the narrative differs slightly. Although the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* almost follows the Āraṇyaka version of the myth, it also adds that after the killing of Kārtavīrya, his sons took revenge by killing Jamadagni.[175] It further introduces a new dimension by elaborating upon details of the killing and says that the head of Jamadagni was cut off and taken away by the wicked sons of Kārtavīrya.[176]

The *Padma Purāṇa*[177] narrates that when Kārtavīrya seized the cow forcibly the cow destroyed the king's army and vanished into the sky. "The king, seeing his army struck, was overcome by anger. With his fist he struck Jamadagni.... Being struck by him in many ways, he was weakened. The best brahmana suddenly fell to the ground and died".[178] The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[179] adds several new dimensions to this episode. It holds Chandragupta, the minister of Kārtavīrya, responsible for assaulting Jamadagni. But Jamadagni did not die at that time. However, Reṇukā and her sons believed that Jamadagni was killed and started preparing for his last rites. Paraśurāma had vowed that he would kill all kshatriyas thrice seven times because his mother had beaten her belly or chest as many times in lamentation. Meanwhile, an incorporeal speech advised them to wait for some time and not to hurry to cremate the body. Suddenly the sage Bhṛgu came to the hermitage and resuscitated Jamadagni with his knowledge of *mṛtasañjīvanī vidyā.* But finally, one day Jamadagni was killed by the son of Kārtavīrya, called Śura Śurasena. Here, like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* these marauders took away the head of Jamadagni along with them.[180]

The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* offers a distinct narrative in this context and it is the only text which shows Jamadagni fighting a war with Kārtavīrya. It shows that Jamadagni put on a military dress and led the millions of armed warriors produced from the body of the divine cow. He had almost killed the king with the Nārāyaṇa weapon, but then revived him with his mantra. *Muni* came back home after establishing reconciliation with the king. However, the king returned with a larger army and stole the

auspicious cow. Finally, he killed Jamadagni with a spear given to him by Dattātreya. This Purāṇa uses this episode to propagate widow burning through a long, didactic section. Bhṛgu appears on the scene, consoles the family and, when asked about the provisions for immolation during the menstruation period of women, he forcefully argues that whatever may be the condition at that time, a faithful wife must accompany her husband to death.[181]

War between Paraśurāma and Kārtavīrya

It is interesting to note that there is not much difference in the numerous version about the way in which Kārtavīrya was killed by Paraśurāma. In fact, the redactors have developed very few details of this component of the myth. The Āraṇyaka and Śāntiparva versions of this myth state in just one line that Rāma cut off the thousand arms of Kārtavīrya and killed him in a ferocious war. The *Brahma Purāṇa*,[182] *Vāyu Purāṇa*[183] and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*[184] simply mention the act of killing without much detail. The *Padma Purāṇa* does not describe the two stages of the war as is found in the *Mahābhārata* in and most of the Purāṇas. In these versions, the sequence of events follows the same pattern, i.e. in the first round Kārtavīrya takes away the cow/calf and Paraśurāma kills Kārtavīrya, and in the second stage, Kārtavīrya's sons murder sage Jamadagni and then Paraśurāma annihilates of his sons and other kshatriyas. The *Padma Purāṇa* says, "The Rāma of great lustre easily burnt the army of the king in a moment with the missile of Viṣṇu. Then Rāma of unlimited valour cut off the thousand arms of the wicked Kārtavīrya with his sharp axe. The very brave king could not fight with Rāma in the battle."[185]

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[186] narrates the war in some detail, wherein the kind of army, weapons and strategies employed by Kārtavīrya is elaborated upon. It says that Sahasrārjuna employed seventeen formidable divisions or *akṣauhiṇī* army equipped with all kinds of weapons like mace, swords, arrows, javelins, *śataghnī* and *śakti*. But the glorious Rāma single-handedly slaughtered them all. Then Arjuna himself came to fight and attacked Paraśurāma

with uprooted trees. Rāma first cut off his hands and then chopped off his head. When their father was thus killed, Arjuna's ten thousand sons ran away in panic.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*[187] devote large sections on this theme of warfare, where various stages of warfare have been depicted with literary elaboration. However, two things are distinct in these versions in comparison to others. First is the over-emphasis on the weapons given by Śiva; and second, the realisation by Kārtavīrya that his final moment has arrived. In fact, the whole detail seems to project a picture that Paraśurāma with Śivaite weapons defeated Kārtavīrya, who was also an avatāra of the Sudarśana Chakra or disscus of Viṣṇu and a protege of Dattātreya, another avatāra of Viṣṇu. So the whole warfare is moulded into a Śivaite versus Viṣṇuite battle. The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* gives more importance to *mantra* and *kavacha* than real weapons and dedicates six chapters on the elaboration of good and bad dreams and omens along with *mantra* and *kavacha*. A detailed observation on this aspect of cultic tension is made in the fifth chapter.

As far as the use of specific weapons by Paraśurāma is concerned, the *Mahābhārata* clearly suggests the use of the bow and arrow to kill Kārtavīrya. Some of the Purāṇas, like *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu*, *Matsya* and *Narasiṃha* Purāṇas do not specify any weapon. However, the *Brahma Purāṇa*,[188] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*,[189] *Padma Purāṇa*[190] and *Skanda Purāṇa*[191] clearly mention that Paraśurāma chopped off the arms and the head of Kārtavīrya with a sharp axe. This question of weapons has an important bearing on the issue of nomenclature, when one inquires why Jāmadagnya Rāma became popular as Paraśurāma. Perhaps the beheading of Reṇukā through his axe on the one hand and an effort to distinguish between Dāśarathī Rāma and Jāmadagya Rāma on the other led to this kind of emphasis on the axe in Puranic literature.[192] It is also possible that the role of the Paraśurāma cult in the forest-clearing operations in south India might have resulted in the shift from the arrow to the axe as a more meaningful symbol.

To sum up this discussion on the sifting emphasis of different elements in the myth of Kārtavīrya annihilation, one finds an attempt to improve the image of Kārtavīrya and attribute a rationale for this kind of conflict. Although the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version tried to change the course of events simply by saying that Kārtavīrya did not go to the ashram of Jamadagni, this was not accepted by the redactors of the Purāṇas. Instead, the Purāṇas tried to enhance the stature of Kārtavīrya by presenting him as a courteous person who behaved nicely with Jamadagni when he came to his ashram. By declaring the sacrificial cow as Kāmadhenu or Surabhi, some kind of excuse is provided for Kārtavīrya's attempt to possess it. He is shown as offering compensation for the cow. And finally, his minister is held responsible for advising the king and pushing him to commit the deed. Except for the *Padma Purāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, none of the texts hold Kārtavīrya responsible for the killing of Jamadagni. Thus, by subtle shifts, a sustsained attempt seems to have been made to brighten the image of Kārtavīrya.

6. Text and Context

The most important reference to the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya conflict myth comes from the Tīrthayātrāparva of Āraṇyakaparva in the *Mahābhārata*.[193] Akṛtavraṇa, the narrator of this version, is not said to be a Bhārgava but a disciple of Paraśurāma. This version includes myths related to the lineage and killing of Kārtavīrya and other kshatriyas, blood oblation to manes, sacrifice and land donation. Tīrthayātrāparva is full of various kinds of myths related to numerous *ṛṣis* and kings who have otherwise nothing much to do with the main story-line of the epic. In fact, the entire Āraṇyakaparva is full of such *ākhyānas* as *Śālvavadhopākhyāna*, *Nalopākhyāna* and other elaborate myths of Agastya–Lopāmudrā, Sagara, Uśinara, Gayā, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, Yavakṛti, Aṣṭāvakra, etc. Among the Bhṛgus, the myth of Dadhīchi and Chyavana is also present apart from that of Paraśurāma. Therefore, the myths of Paraśurāma and the Bhṛgus are not exclusive in their presence; rather, they are only a part of a large collection of myths in this section. Any attempt

to see the presence of the Paraśurāma myth in this section as 'Bhṛguisation' of the *Mahābhārata* will amount to overlooking the entirety of the text. The absorption of various myths in this particular portion is seen as an attempt to fill up a 'temporal hiatus'[194] through the pilgrimage of the Pāṇḍavas, which resulted in the inflation of the text and not interpolation in the strict sense of the term. It creates a sense of journey and time passed through recounting of various stories as pilgrimage progresses, as might have been the practice in the earlier times. During that pilgrimage, Yudhiṣṭhira is taken to Mahendra Parvat where the legend of Paraśurāma is narrated by his disciple Akṛtavraṇa to them. Thus pilgrimage is the thematic context of this myth.

Another important version of this myth is located in the Rājadharmānuśāsana Parva of the Śāntiparva.[195] Interestingly, this reference is also placed in the background of *tīrtha* or pilgrimage. Kṛṣṇa narrates this story to Yudhiṣṭhira when they were passing by Rāmahṛda in Kurukṣetra. The Śāntiparva is also one of those portions of the *Mahābhārata* which has absorbed myths along with cultic and didactic material on a large scale from diverse sources. The nature of the narrative allowed this kind of addition without creating much obstruction for the main storyline. Some kind of textual interval or gap was either created or found by the redactors to accommodate such sections. This version presents this legend in a different perspective from that of Akṛtavraṇa. The main agenda of this version seems to be the reinterpretation of the entire Paraśurāma legend in a different social context. It also highlights the fact that versions are not meaningless repetitions, but through varying focuses, they serve different purposes and agenda.

The last two references to the myth of Kārtavīrya annihilation are found in the Mokṣadharmaparva of the Śāntiparva[196] and Anugītāparva of the Aśvamedhika parva.[197] Both these myths occur in the didactic section and in a way try to highlight the futility of violence. The earlier one is the part of a dialogue between Nāgarāja and his wife who is trying to convince him about the greatness of compassion and uses the myth of Paraśurāma's killing Kārtavīrya as a negative symbol of anger and violence. The later one also

tries to comment on the futility of violence perpetrated by Paraśurāma. In fact, the mechanism of the appearance of *pitṛs* is used here also; they ask Paraśurāma not to kill kshatriyas anymore. The story of King Alarka is related—who achieved salvation through conquest of his own desire and pursuance of meditation. This highly didactic section in a way aims to highlight the virtue of penance and the spirit of *bhakti*.[198] It needs to be recalled that even Kārtavīrya has been shown as a haughty and arrogant person in this narrative, who thought that no one could defeat him. One day, while he was shooting arrows at the ocean, Samudra told him that Paraśurāma will give him a challenge. He reached the hermitage of Jamadagni, intoxicated with the pride of victory, and destroyed the ashram. Finally, he was killed by Paraśurāma. This is the only version where both Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma have been portrayed in negative terms. So, the entire focus is on shedding one's ego and embracing the virtues of meditation and penance. Therefore, out of these four references, only one version uses the positive image of Paraśurāma. Two of them occur in the thematic context of *tīrthayātrā* and the other two in the didactic context.

As far as the Purāṇas are concerned, most of the references to the Kārtavīrya-killing myth came largely in three contexts: [a] *Vaṃśānucharita*, [b] *avatāra*, and [c] *tīrtha*. Out of these references, the maximum number of occurrences are located in the context of the description of the Yadu dynasty and its lineage. For example, *Vāyu*, *Matsya*, *Viṣṇu* and *Padma Purāṇas* narrate this myth along with an elaborate panegyric of Kārtavīrya.[199]

All these narratives are composed from the point of view of Kārtavīrya rather than Paraśurāma. At the end of the text, it is added in just one line: "but it is very strange that his [Kārtavīrya] thundering arms were cut down by Paraśurāma, the descendant of Bhṛgu"[200]. Some of the Purāṇas, especially *Brahma*, *Padma*, *Narasiṃha* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas*, give details of the exploits of Paraśurāma as an avatāra of Viṣṇu.[201] In these texts the focus is obviously on the deeds of Paraśurāma, but the credit is mainly given to the supreme god Viṣṇu and Paraśurāma is made just an agent of execution. The *Skanda Purāṇa* recounts this myth in the

context of *tīrtha*, where the story of Rāmahṛda is elaborated with the help of this myth.[202]

However, the *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* presents a different picture. Its entire *Gaṇeśa khaṇḍa* is weaved around the theme of the Paraśurāma–Kartavirya conflict myth. Nevertheless, Paraśurāma is presented as a wretched and pitiable character in this text. It devotes almost fifteen chapters simply to convey the idea that Paraśurāma had no power of himself. It describes how he went begging from one deity to another to find a solution to kill Kārtavīrya and kshatriyas of the world twenty-one times. The redactor loses no opportunity to humiliate and pronounce all kind of disparaging words about Paraśurāma. Therefore, this version of the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya conflict myth occurs in the background of a kind of cultic vendetta, where a text denigrates a deity to wipe out his following. Although *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* seems to be influenced by the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa,* the latter provides somewhat better treatment to this myth. Therefore, this myth is portrayed in a variety of contexts, which has an important bearing on the meaning and function of this myth.

This overview gives an impression that as far as the Purāṇas are concerned, Paraśurāma was reduced to a marginal figure. The myth of Kārtavīrya annihilation had lost its relevance for them and it was transformed into a myth of *tīrtha* and *dāna.* Despite his apotheosis as an avatāra in these texts, his personality does not show that kind of vitality and power as we find in the folk narratives and cults of marginal communities.[203] Paraśurāma ceased to be a brahmanical ideal and this myth became an awkward narrative for brahmanas of north India, who often had to beg for patronage from the kshatriyas. Efforts to improve the image of Kārtavīrya in the Śāntiparva and subsequently in the Purāṇas can be explained only in that light. Myth creation was perhaps a social exercise in which various segments of patrons exerted their influence and brahmanas, as authors represent just one dimension of the text composition processes. That is why the absence of kshatriyas and better portrayal of Paraśurāma's image go together in south India.

One of the most important results of the change in the emphasis on various small components of this myth is the transformation of the image of Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma. Starting from the Akṛtavraṇa version and going on to the Purāṇas one finds that surprisingly, the image of Kārtavīrya improves radically and that of Paraśurāma fades away. It is true that in the Purāṇas Paraśurāma emerges as an avatāra but through that mechanism his individuality and prowess is sacrificed. From a formidable warrior he is turned into a lifeless mechanical figure in the Purāṇas. In contrast to this, the image of Kārtavīrya gradually improves. It seems that the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version represents the intermediary stage between Āraṇyakaparva and the Purāṇas. While Paraśurāma is accommodated as an avatāra, Kārtavīrya gains the status of a great mythical king with several great achievements to his credit. Ultimately, in the *Nārada Purāṇa*[204] he attains the status of a god and cult figure.

The Śāntiparva version tried to improve the image of Kārtavīrya through his portrayal as a great donor who donated the entire earth after conquering it. One day the fire/sun god appeared before him in the guise of a brahmana and begged for alms to satisfy his hunger. Sahasrārjuna granted him his request and in the process he had to burn the entire earth along with its villages, countries and forests. Inside a forest, the fire burnt the ashram of Āpava Vasiṣṭha, who cursed Sahasrārjuna that Paraśurāma would cut off his shoulders one day. This narrative has reflection in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* too, where Lord Bhāskara in disguise went to the city of Mahishmatī and asked to feed him and after receiving assurances, he revealed his real identity. Arjuna burned an entire forest for him, which also destroyed the hermitage of Vasiṣṭha, who cursed Arjuna that one day Paraśurāma would cut off his thousand hands.[205]

Therefore, through this portrayal of a great donor and grafting of the myth of Āpava Vasiṣṭha, the position of Kārtavīrya is also alleviated and that of Paraśurāma pulled down. Not only that, Paraśurāma is also depicted as a cruel person with a lot of emphasis on how he repeatedly killed even newborn babies of the kshatriyas.

In an interesting twist in the story, once after thousand years the grandson of Viśvāmitra and son of Raibhya lustrous Parāvasu alleged that Paraśurāma wrongfully boasted that he had eliminated all the Kshatriyas of the earth. Then how come so many kshatriyas were present in the sacrifice of Yayāti, he asked. He alleged that it seems Paraśurāma hides in the hills due to the fear of kshatriyas.[206] The text narrates that after hearing this, Paraśurāma started killing kshatriyas again. Paraśurāsma's image takes a major beating in this version of the myth. There is an attempt to improve the image of not only the Vasiṣṭhas but also the Kāśyapas.

Many other references to Kārtavīrya in the *Mahābhārata* reiterate his image of being a great and powerful king.[207] At some places minor references also occur in which some of the characters are compared to Kārtavīrya in order to underline his greatness as a warrior.[208] These are largely allegorical uses of his myth. There are many paragraphs where Kārtavīrya and Paraśurāma are together used as symbols of valour.[209]

Most of the Purāṇas reflect the sentiments of the Śāntiparva version of the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya myth with some modifications. Most of these accounts are part of the description of the Yadu dynasty which narrates that Kārtavīrya was in the seventh generation of Yadu, the eldest son of Yayāti. Kārtavīrya performed a very severe penance for ten thousand years and propitiated Dattātreya, who granted him four excellently glorious boons. He asked for a thousand arms and the right to rule over the entire earth. Then he performed ten thousand *yajñas* without any difficulty and gave away splendid *dānas* to brahmanas. Nārada and Gandharva sang the verses of glory in his honour, after observing the generous behaviour of this saintly king. He was protecting his subjects righteously and none of his subjects lost their wealth, nor were any one of them grief-stricken. As a *yogin*, Arjuna became Parjanya or the lord of the cloud and rain and showered aplenty. He shone like a sun with his autumnal rays. Having conquered the royal assembly of Karkoṭaka [the serpent king] in Mahiṣmatī with a thousand elephants, he established his capital there. Shaken and tossed by him [during his water sports]

Narmadā, wearing a garland with golden fillets approached the king in an apprehensive manner. When the great ocean was agitated by his thousand arms, the great *asuras* in the netherworld used to become stunned and motionless. Agitating it by means of his thousand arms, the king made the ocean resemble the milky sea churned by *devas* and *asuras*. Proudly he went to Laṅkā and overpowered Rāvaṇa along with his army. He defeated and brought Rāvaṇa to Mahiṣmatī and imprisoned him there. The sage Pulastya himself went to Arjuna and propitiated him.The king released Paulastya [i.e. Rāvaṇa] at the request of his sage grandfather. This lengthy passage from *Matsya Purāṇa* and *Vāyu Purāṇa*[210] gives us an insight into the kind of praises that were heaped upon this great king. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* also repeats these stereotypical image of Kārtavīrya.[211] Most of the Purāṇas speak in the same language and even those who are somewhat sympathetic to Paraśurāma, do not miss an opportunity to praise Kārtavīrya as well.

The highest stature to Kārtavīrya is provided by the *Nārada Purāṇa*, which is a text dated around 900–950 CE and composed somewhere in eastern India.[212] Paraśurāma is given no importance in this text, although his myth has been mentioned in the context of the *tīrtha* of Gokarṇa and Kurukṣetra. But Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna has been elevated to the level of a god in this Purāṇa. There are two full chapters in this Purāṇa which are called *Kārtavīrya Māhātmya Kathanam*.[213] In this *māhātmya* he is not only declared an incarnation of the Sudarśana Chakra but portrayed as a full-fledged cult figure having a hundred and eight names, his *mantra, beeja, kavacha, dīpa* and other paraphernalia related to other deities of tantric pantheon. It is interesting to note that among his several names and recounted achievements, his encounter with Paraśurāma has not even been mentioned. There is no attempt to change, reverse or even falsify his position vis-á-vis Paraśurāma. It has simply been ignored and the narrative pretends that nothing of this sort is even known. The other most important thing about this *māhātmya* is its close association with the Dattātreya cult. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* also follows the same pattern.[214] It

seems that perhaps the followers of the Dattātreya cult were responsible for this kind of a portrayal of Kārtavīrya. Hence, it was not a cult of the vanquished as one finds in the case of the king Bali; had that been the case it should have been propagated by the cult of vanquisher. He had a small but independent social base and may be even in the case of Bali; it could have been the same. Kārtavīrya was worshipped not because he was defeated by Paraśurāma but was deified despite being defeated.

To sum up, it may be said that the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya myth continued to serve as a nucleus of the Paraśurāma cycle of myths but its focus and agenda kept on transforming radically. Its multiple shades were created due to changing authors and patrons, which could be understood only by situating it in its total textual and thematic context. Instead of creating a blanket image of a cult figure like Paraśurāma, it would be more useful to see him in relationship with other mythical personalities. The weakened image of Paraśurāma in the Purāṇas and works of the "brahmanical" tradition and its strengthening in local traditions and cults of peripheral regions give important insights about the spread and survival of the Paraśurāma cult.

Footnotes

1 There are more than 115 references to Paraśurāma in the *Mahābhārata*. But some of the important narratives are located at C.E. 1.2.4; 1.64.4; 1.169–171; 2.13.2,22; 3.81.22; 3.115–117; 5.94–96; 5.174–187; 8. 24. 131–160; 8.29.1–7; 12. 48–49; 12. 348 . 16– 17; 13. 83–86; 14.29–30.

2 Alf Hiltebeitel, "Hinduism," in Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 6, p. 342; idem, *The Ritual of Battle*, pp. 14–15.

3 R.C. Dutt, *Ancient India*, I, pp.153, 212; K.P. Padmanabha Menon, "Discursive Notes on Malabar and its Place-Names", *The Indian Antiquary*, August,1902, pp. 341; Jarl Charpentier, "Paraśu-Rāma : The Main Outlines of his Legend", *Kuppuswami Shastri Commemoration Volume*, 1937, pp. 9; P. Anujan Achan, "The Paraśurāma Legend and its Significance: The Ancestry of Paraśurāma", *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department*, Cochin State, 1934–35, p.1 [Supplement];s Kumari S.S. Janaki, "Paraśurāma", Purāṇa, 1966, Part I pp. 53–54. Adalbert Gail, *Paraśurāma Brahmane und Krieger*, 1977, p. 221.

4 V. S. Sukthankar, Epic Studies VI, "The Bhrgus and the Bhāratas: A Text-Historical Study," *ABORI*, XVIII, October 1936, Part I, pp. 65–68.

5 *Ṛgveda* X .93. 14.

6 *Ṛgveda* X 93.15.

7 Ludwig, Translation of the Ṛgveda 3,166 quoted in A.A Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index*, II p. 222.

8 D.D. Kosambi, "Early Brahmanas and Brahmanism", *JBBRAS*, 23, 1947, p.43.

9 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* IV.6. I. 7.

10 *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa* III.40. I; IV 16. I.

11 *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, Pañcikā VII. 27–34, in J.Eggeling, *SBE*, 43 p. 344–5.

12 J. Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, II.pp.436–40 quoted in Kumari S.Janaki, op.cit., pp. 53–54.

13 D.D.Kosambi, op.cit. p. 43; Sidhesvara Sastri Chitrav, *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p. 389.

14 Kumari S.S. Janaki, op.cit. p. 53; A. Achan, op.cit. pp. 2.

15 *Indische Studien*, Vol. I p.215 quoted in Kumai S.S. Janaki, op.cit. p.54.

16 Hargovinda Sastri ed. *Manu Smṛti*, X. 34, p. 571.

17 Przyluski, *IA*, 1926 quoted in Jarl Charpentier op.cit. p. 9 fn.

18 Jarl Charpenter, op.cit. p. 9 fn.

19 *Atharvaveda*. X.I.26; *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* XVI. 27; XXX. 7. [cf. Mṛgaṇyu, *Ṛgveda*.X.40 4.] *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, I.5. I. I III, 4, 3, I; *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* XIV. 9, 12; cf. *Vedic Index*, op.cit. II p. 172.

20 Max Muller, *History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 251.

21 Amulya Sen, *The Hindu Avatārs–Suggestion for Identification*, quoted in Swami Banagovinda Parampanthi, *Bhagawan Parasurama and Evolution of Culture in Northeast India*, p. 27.

22 J.M. Chatterjee, *Bengali Translation of Gatha or Bhārgava Veda*, Introduction, quoted in Ibid. p.27.

23 *Ṛgveda*. VIII. 6. 46: Here it occurs as a name of an individual.

24 Pacoike, *India in Greece*, quoted in Durgadas Lahiri, *Prithivir Itihas II*, pp. 30–31 and Swami Banagovinda Parampanthi op.cit. pp. 27–28.

25 A. Padamanabhayya, "Ancient Bhṛgus", *JOR*, V, 1931, pp. 55, 80; A. J. Karandikar, "Dāśarājaña Yuddha", quoted in V.G. Rahurkar, *The Vedic Priest of the Fire Cult*, pp. 16–20.

26 Hermann Weller, "Who Were the Bhriguids", *ABORI*, 18, 1936, Part III, pp. 296–302.

[27] D.D. Kosambi, "The Study of Ancient Indian Tradition", *Indica*, Bombay, 1953, pp. 196–214.

[28] *Ṛgveda*. X. 86. 23; *Vedic Index*, I. P. 504; For the erotic overtones of this hymn, see Philip Lutgendorf, "Like Mother, Like Son: Sita and Hanuman", *Manushi*, 114, Sept.–Oct. 1999, pp. 22–35.

[29] *Vedic Index*, op.cit. Vol. 1, pp.504–505.

[30] V.S. Sukthankar, "Epic Studies VI"p. 2; V.G. Rahurkar *The Vedic Priest of the Fire Cult*, p. 8.

[31] Swami Banagovinda Paramapanthi, op.cit. p.28.

[32] Kumari S.S. Janaki, op.cit. p. 54.

[33] Janaki Das Sharma, ed. and tr. *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*, Ch. 74–76.

[34] Defeat of Indra at the hand of Kṛṣṇa, Varuṇa's conquest by Rāma Dāśarathi and miserable condition of many Vedic deities in the Puranic literature may be seen in this context.

[35] This portion has been deleted in the critical edition of *Mahābhārata* but it is part of III. 14–K1.2. BD. [except D11–3.5]. C.R. Deshpande, *Transmission of Mahābhārata Tradition*, p. 65; G.P. 3.99. 39–71, pp.1237–39.

[36] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.3. 258–275, G.P. 3. 273–292 pp.1714–1770.

[37] Jarl Charpentier,op.cit. p. 10.

[38] Aśvaghoṣa, *Buddhacarita*, IX. 25. *Bhīṣmeṇa Gaṅgodarasambhavena Rāmeṇa Rāmeṇa ca Bhārgaveṇa Śrutvā kṛtaṃ karma pituḥ priyārtham pitus tvam apy arhasi kratumiṣṭam.*

[39] Classical as well as folk traditions of south India have generated several people- and place-related myths, which reflect such land-centred myths, but killing of kshatriyas are largely underrepresented. I. Karve, "The Paraśurāma", *JUB*, Vol. I. 1932–33, pp.115–139.

[40] Kesavan Veluthat, *Brāhmaṇa Settlements in Kerala*, pp. 1–19; Nagendra Rao, *The Historical Tradition of South Canara and the Brahmanical Groups: A Study of Grāmapaddhatī and Sahyādri Khaṇḍa*, Unpublished M. Phil. Dissertation, Manglore University, 1995; Through the courtesy of Professor Kesavan Veluthat.

[41] Kesavan Veluthat op.cit. pp 12–14, 22.

[42] *Akanānūru*, 220, Tr. by Kesavan Veluthat, op.cit., pp.12–13.

[43] *Akanānūru*, 251, 281; Kuruntokai 73; M.G.S. Narayanan, "History from Mūṣakavaṃśakāvya of Atula", Proceedings of the Silver Jubilee session of the All India Oriental Conference, Calcutta, 1 969, quoted in Kesavan Veluthat, op.cit. p.18.

[44] Vedic Index, I p.276.

[45] V.G. Rahurkar, *The Vedic Priests of the Fire-Cult*, p.23.

[46] V.G. Rahurkar, *The Seers of the Rg Veda*, p. 216.

[47] *Ṛgveda*. I. 60. 1.

[48] *Vedic Index*, II, p.109; V.G. Rahurkar, *The Seers of the Ṛg Veda*, p. 216.

[49] *Ṛgveda*. IX. 65; X. 19.

[50] *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, III. 34; *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 18. 9. 1; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.6.1.1; *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 9. 1; *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* I. 3. 1. 1.

[51] *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* III. 34. It is interesting to note that *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* [I. 8. 2. 5] tells us that Bhṛgu was born from the semen of Indra. *Mahābhārata* incorporates two versions on this theme. *Ādiparva* [I. 60. 40 G.P. 1. 66. 41. p.189] says that Bhṛgu was born from the heart of Brahmā while *Anuśāsanaparva* [B. Ch.85, Sukthankar, op.cit., p.54, G.P. 13. 85. 99–106 pp. 5735–5736.] attributes it to the seed of Prajāpati which was released in the sacrificial fire. *Vāyu Purāṇa* I.9.100; 3. 4. 31–38.

[52] Except *Ṛgveda* this form of his name is found in all Vedic texts, *Nirukta* [IV.19] and *Mahābhārata*; *Vedic Index*,Vol. I, pp.264–265.

[53] *Ṛgveda* I.116.10; I.117.13; I118. 6; V.74.5; X.39.4.

[54] *Ṛgveda*. I.116.10; I.117.13; I. 118. 6; V. 74. 5; VII. 68. 6; VII. 71. 5; X. 39. 4. X. 59. 1; *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* III.120–128; *Pañchaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* XIV. 6. 10.

[55] V.G. Rahurkar, *The Vedic Priests of the Fire-Cult*, p. 23.

[56] *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, IV. I. 5. I.

[57] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. *Ādiparva* ch. 4, G.P. *Ādiparva* ch. 4 to 6 pp. 62–66.

[58] Uru is said to be one of the seven seers of *Ṛgveda*. IX. 108. 4–5 and *Sarvānukramaṇī* refers to him as an Aṅgirases, V.G. Rahurkar, *The Seers of the Ṛg Veda*, p.230.

[59] *Ṛgveda*. VIII.102. 4.

[60] *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* VI. 33.

[61] *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* XXX. 5.

[62] *Vedic Index*, op.c it. I, p.129.

[63] *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* XXI. 10. 6; Sidheshavara Shastri Chitrav, *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p.104.

[64] *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa*, I. 18.

[65] *Mahābhārata*,C.E. 1. 60. 45 G.P. 1. 66. 46 p. 189.

[66] Ibid C. E. 1. 169–171, G.P. 1.177–179, pp.523–27.

[67] Ibid, B.13. 4. 7–10; G.P. 13. 4. 1– 21 pp. 5439–40; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4. 7 *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9. 15.5–11; *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p. 95.

[68] *Mahābhārata*, G.P. 13. 56. 4–7 pp. 5649–50, *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p. 95.

[69] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 1. 60.46; G.P. 1. 66. 47 p. 190, *Harivaṃśa*,1.27.

[70] *Brahma Purāṇa*, Ch. 10.

[71] *Viṣṇudhrmottara Purāṇa* 1.32; *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 29. 89.

[72] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 3. 1. 74–100; *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*. p.95.

[73] *Rgveda*. III. 62.18, VIII. 101.8, IX. 62.24, IX. 65.25.

[74] V.G.Rahurkar, *The Vedic Priests of the Fire-Cult*, p.23.

[75] *Taittirīya Saṃhitā*, VII. 1. 9. 1; *Pañcaviṃsa Brāhmaṇa* XXI. 10; *Atharvaveda*, II. 32. 30, IV. 29. 3; V. 28. 7; VI. 130. 1; VI. 137. 1; XVIII. 3. 15.

[76] *Ṛgveda*. VIII. 53. 5–16.

[77] V.G.Rahurkar, *The Seers of the Ṛg Veda* p.25; *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p.222.

[78] *Ṛgveda*. III.53.16.

[79] John E. Mitchiner, *Traditions of the Seven Ṛṣis*, p. 84.

[80] *Ṛgveda*. IX. 107; IX. 67; X. 137.

[81] *Rgveda*. I. 31. 5; IV. 42. 8; X.109. 4; X. 130. 7.

[82] *Ṛgveda*. X. 130.7; V.G. Rahurkar, *The Seers of the Ṛg Veda*, p.230.

[83] *Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra* 24. 5–10; *Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra* 12. 1. 15; *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, *Pariśiṣṭa*, *Hiraṇayakeśin Śrauta Sūtra*, 8. 714 [ASS edition]; *Mānava Śrauta Sūtra* 11.8.1–10, *Vaikhānasa Sūtra*, *Pravaraprasna*; J. E. Mitchiner, op.cit, pp. 82–89.

[84] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 1.2. 32.100–120; *Matsya Purāṇa* 145. 81–118, 195. 1–202. 14.

[85] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 2. 1. 15–66, 2. 38. 9–116; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 1. 2. 36. 17–18, 3. 4. 1. 9–114; *Harivaṃśa appendix* 1.1; *Śiva Purāṇa* 5. 34. 34–65.

[86] *Agni Purāṇa* 20.8–17, *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 1.2.11.1–42; *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 5.1; *Kūrma Purāṇa* 1.2. 1.13, 1.17. 1–1 18.27; *Linga Purāṇa* 1.5. 37–50; *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 52.14–26; *Śiva Purāṇa* 7.1.17. 22–35; *Vāyu Purāṇa* 1. 28.1–35.

[87] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1. 10. 6–10; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 4. 1. 8–41.

[88] *Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra*, 12. 10. 13, *Sāyaṇa bhāṣya*, *Ṛgveda*. VSM, Vol. II p. 1.

[89] J.E. Mitchiner, op.cit., pp.124–125.

[90] Ibid, p. 81.

[91] It will be interesting to note here that the descendants of Jamadagni were said to be the kshatriyas rather than brahmanas in some of the gotra-related accounts, see J.E. Mitchiner op.cit. p.82.

[92] V.G. Rahurkar, "The Origin of the Gotra System in the Ṛgveda", *ABORI*, 53, 1972, pp. 93–97.

[93] V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit., pp. 65–66.

[94] Dan Sperber, "Claude Lévi Strauss", in John Sturrock ed. *Structuralism and Since*, p. 42.

[95] *Ṛgveda.* VII. 18. 6; Hermann Weller, "Who Were Bhriguids?" *ABORI*, 18 1936, part III,pp. 296–302.

[96] *Ṛgveda.* VII.18.5–7.

[97] E. Sieg, "Bhṛgu", in J. Hastings ed. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p.558; V.G. Rahurkar, *The Vedic Priests of the Fire-Cult* p.12; D. D. Kosambi, "Early Stages of the Caste system in Northern India", *JBBRAS*, New Series, 22, 1946, Published in 1947, p. 41.

[98] V.G. Rahurkar, *The Vedic Priests of the Fire-Cult*, p.12.

[99] D.D. Kosambi, "The Study of Ancient Indian Tradition", *Indica*, The Indian Historical Research Institute Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volume, St. Xavier College, Bombay,1953, p. 212; idem, "Early Stages of the Caste system in Northern India", *JBBRAS*, New Series, 22, 1946, Published in 1947, p 41, idem, "Origin of Brahmin Gotras", *JBBRAS*, New Series, 26, 1950–51. p. 43.

[100] *Atharvaveda. II.* 5.3; IV.14.3–5; V. 19.1; XVIII.1.58; They are mentioned as part of Bhṛgavaṅgirasas also *Atharvaveda.* IV. 11; V. 4, etc.

[101] M. Bloomfield, *Atharvaveda*, V.18.1,9; 19.6; *SBE*, XLII, pp. 169–171, pp.430–34.

[102] *Atharvaveda.* V. 18. 10.

[103] *Atharvaveda.* V. 19. 1.

[104] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.13.30 G.P. 13.30 pp.5577–5581; E. Sieg, op.cit., p. 560. Thaneshwar Sarmah, *The Bhāradvajas in Ancient India*, pp. 169–174; F.E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition* pp. 151–156.

[105] *Brahma Purāṇa* 11. 201–204; *Padma Purāṇa*, I. 12. 132–137; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV. 11. 7. [Wilson see fn on p. 588] Vāyu Purāṇa, 32. 49–53.

[106] Ranaprasad Sharma, *Pauranik Kośa*, p.473, q.v. Vitahavya.

[107] K. M. Munshi, "The Mahiṣmati of Kārtavīrya", *IA*, November, 1922, pp. 217–221.

[108] *Matsya Purāṇa*, XLIII. 46–49, *Harivaṃśa*, Index, XXXIV. 49[see fn 104].

[109] *Matsya Purāṇa*, CVIV., 52–55.

[110] *Ṛgveda.* VI. 15. 2. 3.

[111] *Ṛgveda.* VII. 19. 3.

[112] *Ṛgveda.* VI. 15. 3, *Sāmaveda.* II. 917; Thaneshwar Sarmah, op.cit., pp.169–174.

[113] *Atharvaveda.* V. 18. 10–11.

[114] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.13. 31.7–54; G.P.13.30.7–54, pp. 5577–5580; Thaneshwar Sarmah, op.cit. p. 172.

[115] K.M. Shrimali, *History of Pañcāla*, pp.175–177.

[116] K.M. Munshi, *The Early Aryans in Gujarat*, pp.71–74; idem, "The historical value of the Parasurama Tradition", *NIA*, Bombay, 1943–44, p. 222; The author also viewed that Sṛñjayas merged into the Bhāratas to form the Kuru–Pañcāla people.

[117] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 47. 74–87 pp.735–36.

[118] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.1. 169–171, G.P. 1.177–179 pp. 523–27.

[119] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I.32.1–20.

[120] As said earlier, this work does not present Paraśurāma as a historical personality, and his myths do not reflect historical events taking place within a short span of few decades. It may be clearly seen that his narratives developed over many centuries. But here just a theoritical possibility is being listed that the origin of Paraśurāma myth may have a historical seed, which is beyond any verification. The main corpus of this research is not influenced by this possibility, because it is a study focusing on the perpetuation and transformation of the Paraśurāma myths.

[121] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth", in his *Structural Anthropology*, 226–228; R.P. Goldman, *Gods, Priests and Warrior*, pp. 75–78.

[122] *Ṛgveda* VIII. 53. 15–16.

[123] *Mahābhārata* B.3. 115, 12.49. G.P. 3.115.19–45, pp. 1275–1277, 12. 49. 7–30 pp. 4543–44; V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit. p.22.

[124] *Ṛgveda*. VII. 101. 15.

[125] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 8. 24.131–160 G.P. 8.34.128–158, pp.3861–63.

[126] *Ṛgveda*. IX. 6. 5., tr. Wilson, VI. p.205.

[127] *Sāmaveda* V. II. 6.2.3.

[128] *Atharvaveda*. II. 5. 3.

[129] *Ṛgveda*. X. 5. 2. 2. Tr.Wilson, VI. pp. 205.

[130] *Ṛgveda*. VII. 18. 11.

[131] Adelbert Gail, *Paraśurāma Brahmane und Krieger*, pp. 221–222.

[132] *Mahābhārata* 3.115–117; G.P. 3.115–117, pp.1275–83.

[133] Ibid. C.E.12. 48–49 G.P. 12. 48–49, pp. 4541–48.

[134] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* IX. 16. 2.

[135] *Padma Purāṇa* VI. 24. 17–23.

[136] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2. 3. 26. 43.

[137] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 26. 37–40; *Brahma Purāṇa*, 11. 175–181; *Padma Purāṇa*, I. 12. 121, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV. 11. 6; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX. 15.20; *Matsya Purāṇa*, XLIII. 32; *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III.33.29.

[138] *Mahābhārata*, G.P. 3. 116. 19 p. 1280.

[139] *Mahābhārata*, G.P. 12. 49. 35. p. 4545.

[140] *Matsya*. XLIII 29–30; Vāyu XXXII.26; *Harivaṃśa* I. XXXIII.28; *Bhāgavata* IX.15.26; *Narasiṃha* LVI. 33; *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I.23.9,20.

[141] *Mahābhārata*, 5.19. 9; *Vāyu Purāṇa*, XXXVI. 86; *Harivaṃśa*, II. XXXVII. 29; K.M.Munshi, "The Mahiṣmati of Kārtavirya", *IA*, November 1922, p. 218.

[142] K.M.Munshi, op.cit., pp 217– 221.

[143] M.C.Joshi, "Archaeology and Indian Tradition: Some Observations", *Purātattava*, No. 8, 1975–76, p.102; H.D.Sankalia, B.Subbarao, and S.B.Deo, "*The Excavations at Maheshwar and Navdatoli*".

[144] Mandala and Mahiṣmati [Maheshwar] in Madhya Pradesh have temples dedicated to Sahasrārjuna. *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, pp. 226, 234.

[145] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 241. 17–23.

[146] *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*, 46. 5–6; *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* III.24.1–11.

[147] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX. 15. 23.

[148] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 26.

[149] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 241. 23–26.

[150] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 26. 44–53.

[151] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III.24.10–11.

[152] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* IX. 15. 23–26.

[153] *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*, XLVI. 5–18.

[154] *Mahābhārata*. C.E. 3.116; G.P. 3. 116. 21–22 p. 1280.

[155] Ibid.C.E. 12. 49; G.P. 12. 49. 46–47. p. 4545.

[156] *Padma Purāna*. VI. 241. 1–8.

[157] *Padma Purāṇa* VI. 241. 32; *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* III.24–25.

[158] *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* III.24. 41–51.

[159] *Brahma Purāṇa*, *Vāyu Purāṇa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Matsya Purāṇa* do not make any reference to this theme at all.

[160] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX.15. 24, 36.

[161] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2. 3. 27. 1–45.

[162] Ibid. 2. 3. 29. 16–20.

[163] Ibid. 2. 3. 29. 21.

[164] V. S. Sukthankar, *Epic Studies* VI, pp. 23–24.

[165] *Brāhmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 30. 69–76.

[166] *Mahābhārata* C.E. 3. 116; G.P. 3. 116. 21–22, p. 1280.

[167] Ibid C.E. 12. 49; G. P. 12. 49. 45–47, p. 4545.

[168] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 241. 29.

[169] *Padma Purāṇa* VI. 241. 33–36; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* does not refer to it at all.

[170] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. IX. 15. 26.

[171] *Narasimha Purāṇa* 46. 25–26.

[172] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3. 28. 31–75.

[173] Ibid. 2. 3. 28. 38.

[174] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 3. 116; G.P. 3. 116. 26–28 p. 1280.

[175] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX. 16. 9–12.

[176] Ibid. IX. 16. 12.

[177] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 241. 33–36.

[178] Ibid. VI. 241. 36–38.

[179] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 30.28–61.

[180] Ibid. 2. 3. 45. 9.

[181] *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* III. 26, 27, 28.

[182] *Brahma Purāṇa*, 104. 108–109; 11. 187–193.

[183] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 32. 47.

[184] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV. XI. 7.

[185] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 242. 67–68.

[186] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX. 15. 30–35.

[187] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2. 3. 40; *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* III.35–40.

[188] *Brahma Purāṇa*, II. 104. 108–109.

[189] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX. 15. 34.

[190] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 242. 68.

[191] *Skanda Purāṇa*, Nāgarkhaṇḍa, 68. 32.

[192] Robert Goldman, "Some Observation on the Paraśu of Paraśurāma", *JOI*, 21,1972, pp.53–65.

[193] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.3. 115–117; G.P. 3. 115–117, pp. 1275–83.

[194] Pisani, "Rise of the *Mahābhārata*", quoted in K. Kunjuni Raja, "Architectonics of the *Mahābhārata* and the Place of Legend in its Structure" in R.N.Dandekar, ed. *The Mahābhārata Revisited*, p.87–93.

[195] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.12. 48–49; G.P. 12. 48–49, pp. 4541–48.

[196] Ibid. C.E.12. 348.16–17; G.P. 12. 360. 16–17; p. 5419.

[197] Ibid C.E.14. 29–30; G.P. 14. 29–30; pp.6163–67.

[198] Some Buddhist influences on this section may not be entirely ruled out.

[199] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 32. 8–47, 33. 1–13; *Matsya Purāṇa*, 43. 13–52; 44.1–11; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV. XI. 7; *Padma Purāṇa*, I. 12. 105–134.

[200] *Matsya Purāṇa*, XLIII. 39.

[201] *Brahma Purāṇa*, ch.104; *Padma Purāṇa*, VI.240; *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*, ch. XLVI. and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Ch. XVI.

[202] *Skanda Purāṇa*, Nāgarkhaṇḍa, Ch. 68.

[203] Infra, Chapter Seven.

[204] *Nārada Purāṇa*, III. 76 and 77.

[205] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I.31.1–21.

[206] *Mahābhārata*, G.P. 12. 49. 56–59 p. 4546.

[207] Ibid, G.P. 2. 15. 15 p. 712.

[208] Ibid G.P. 3. 27. 26. p. 1021, 8. 90. 114 p.4088.

[209] Ibid G.P. 3. 302. 8–9, p. 1802.

[210] *Vāyu Purāṇa* chapter 32 *Matsya Purāṇa* Ch. 43 and 44.

[211] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I.23. 1–33.

[212] J.L. Shastri, ed. The *Nārada Purāṇa*, see Introduction for the discussion on its date and location.

[213] *Nārada Purāṇa*, III. 76 and 77.

[214] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I. ch.24 and 25.

Chapter 3

Expansion of the Edifice

Myth-makers and redactors have a tendency to transform myths into history not only by specifying mythical time and space of the event but also by supplying various preceding and succeeding moments in the life of that personality. That is how, through a lot of secondary and justificatory myths, a large edifice is constructed around the nucleus of a myth. All these myths have their autonomy.[1] In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse various accretions and embellishments that made their appearance on the nucleus of the Paraśurāma legend.

1. The Kshatriya-Annihilation Myth

The kshatriya-annihilation myth is an extension of the Kārtavīrya-killing saga of Paraśurāma. This myth has been the centre of attention for a long time and various scholars have tried to use it as a symbol of the brahmana–Kshatriya conflict in ancient India. Some of the scholars, such as V.S. Sukthankar and D.D. Kosambi, presented it as a psychological overcompensation of the brahmanas against their subjugated status in real-life conditions and an attempt to propagate their own social superiority.[2] But, just like the Kārtavīrya myth, this myth too has multiple authors and patrons. As is exemplified in the last chapter of this work, this myth was utilised and propagated even by some kshatriyas to justify their newly-found status. But first, it is important to see the pattern

of occurrences of this myth in the *Mahābhārata* and various Purāṇas.

The first reference to the myth of kshatriya annihilation in the *Mahābhārata* occurs in the Parvasaṃgrahaparva of the Ādiparva.[3] This reference is placed inside a section dealing with the index of events of the *Mahābhārata* and religious merit earned through listening to this epic, i.e. *phalaśruti*. *Phalaśrutis* are believed to be more a part of the Puranic tradition than that of the epic. Moreover, the index of the *Mahābhārata* must have been created after the final redaction of the epic. Therefore, it is quite evident that it occurs in a section belonging to the later strata of the *Mahābhārata*. This story is narrated by Ugraśravā to a gathering of *ṛṣis* around a *tīrtha* called Samantapañchaka. It is interesting that the name of Kārtavīrya is not even mentioned in this context and it only talks about the annihilation of the kshatriyas by Paraśurāma at the dawn of the *Dvāpara yuga*. After the decimation of the kshatriyas, Paraśurāma offered oblation of blood to the manes, who appeared before him and gave him the boon that the five lakes of blood that he created would be famous in the world as a sacred *tīrtha*. The entire focus of this presentation is the creation of the *tīrtha*. Therefore, it is possible that it was the work of a local priestly order who were interested in promoting this place as a *tīrtha*.

The second reference to this myth comes in the Aṃśāvatāraṇaparva of Ādiparva.[4] Here this myth has been used to symbolise a watershed between two phases of mythical time. It demarcates the end of the rule of oppressive kshatriyas and the beginning of a golden period. This short reference contains only two *ślokas* and is located in a section which is highly loaded in the favour of brahamanical superiority. There is no effort to glorify the Bhṛgus through this myth here; rather, it asserts the superiority of all brahmanas over the kshatriyas. Paraśurāma is presented not as a hero but as a representative of brahmanas. It narrates that brahmanas created new righteous kshatriyas through the institution of *niyoga*. So the *Sata yuga* descended on the earth. In the meanwhile, demons, who were earlier defeated by the gods, started taking birth on the earth to enjoy the prosperity of this world and,

therefore, the reign of *adharma* enveloped the earth again. Then Brahmā advised the gods to go and take birth on the earth in different places. That is how the great war was fought between gods/Pāṇḍavas and demons/Kauravas. Thus, this reference is associated with the elaboration of the cycle of creation and destruction. Here the Paraśurāma myth is used as a tool of destruction and preparation for the incarnation of the gods, which is more in tune with Puranic literature. Apart from that, it might also have been related to some kind of original myth of *brahmakṣatra* and a part of the elaboration of a caste myth.

A similar reference is again found in Rājasūyārambhaparva of Sabhāparva[5], where annihilation of kshatriyas by Paraśurāma is again used as the cause of the rise of a new kind of kshatriyas. Śrī Kṛṣṇa explains to Yudhiṣṭhira that since the existing kshatriyas are of lower stature and character, now they have decided among themselves that, the one who conquers them all will be considered the emperor. These are supposed to be those kshatriyas who survived by hiding in different places during the annihilation campaign of Paraśurāma. It may be some kind of allegorical use of the myth also, which is expressed in just one *śloka.*

Inside Sabhāparva, the Southern recension inserts a narrative which describes the extermination of kshatriyas at great length.[6] The critical edition has expunged this portion. Even then, this section is very important from the point of view of this comparative study. In this section, Paraśurāma is not only shown as an avatāra of Govinda but his deeds of Kārtavīrya and kshatriya annihilation is entirely credited to Govinda himself. However, the most important thing about this version is its close similarities with a narrative called *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya.* V.S. Sukthankar had made it one of the most important evidences to prove Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata.*[7]

The saga of the sixteen great kings or *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya*, recounts the heroic deeds of the emperors of the mythical past. It appears twice in the *Mahābhārata,* once in the Śāntiparva and then again in the Droṇparva. The Śāntiparva version seems to be the earlier one, for two reasons. First, it has a smaller text[8] and second, the

Droṇaparva version not only adds many superfluous verses, but it also becomes more ornamental in style, which hints at a later date of composition. The number of verses related to eulogies of these great kings increases from 126 in the Śāntiparva to 261 in the Droṇaparva. Inclusion of the stories of Suvarṇaviṣṭi in the Droṇaparva also points to that direction.

For the purpose of this study, what is more important is that the Droṇaparva, i.e. the extended version of this account, removes Sagara from this list of the sixteen great kings and enumerate Paraśurāma in his place. Although the inclusion of Paraśurāma in this list is somewhat curious, it does not necessarily reflect the growing influence of the Bhṛgus on the *Mahābhārata*. The question arises as to why was only Sagara—who was closely associated with Aurva—one of the prominent Bhṛgus chosen for the replacement. Sagara's proximity to the Bhṛgu clan could have been used to further strengthen the Bhṛgu narrative. It should be recalled that both Sagara and Paraśurāma defeated the Haihayas and perhaps that is a clue why this replacement took place.

As pointed out earlier, *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* of the Droṇaparva has astonishing similarities with a portion of the South Indian recension of the *Mahābhārata*. Therefore, it appears that it was exclusively composed and inserted in the *Mahābhārata* by some southern redactors. It is worth mentioning that in both these accounts the killing of Kārtavīrya is referred to in just one line and then several lines are spent on the description of the conquest of the various regions such as Kaśmir, Darada, Mālava, Chedi, Aṅga, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga, Videha, Tāmralipti, etc.[9] Moreover, both these accounts give strange details about how Paraśurāma killed thousands of kshatriyas through hanging, beating, cutting, poisoning, and drowning and it is all described with a perverted interest. Therefore, on the basis of the similarity of these two accounts it may be said that the replacement of Sagara with that of Paraśurāma belongs not only to a later period but its composition may have been the work of a section of a regional brahmanical order.

It is also possible that some of the southern traditions really believed Paraśurāma to be a mythical king who conquered the earth

and then renounced it. The image of Paraśurāma as a great king might have been buttressed by many of his acts, such as the killing of a great king and warriors, performance of the horse sacrifice and donation of huge wealth and the earth to brahmanas, all generally associated only with a king. Therefore, declaring Paraśurāma a king, particularly by the southern texts is not as baseless as it looks at first sight. It is true that he did not rule any place even in a mythical account, except that he was attributed every other deed which a *chakravartin* could have done. It seems that this was the reason why he was given a place in the list of great kings and might have developed for the first time in the southern recension. The *Keralamāhātmya* has a narrative, which elaborates on how Subrahmaṇya helped Paraśurāma in the founding of a new kingdom.[10] Therefore, the inclusion of Paraśurāma in *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* is not a case of Bhṛguisation but the accommodation of regional narratives in this text. It is also possible that in south India, where kshatriyas were absent, dominance of brahmanas and *brahmakṣatras* provided an impetus to such a myth, and *brahmakṣatras* might have been major patrons of these kinds of myths of victory over kshatriyas.

If *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* of Droṇaparva be accepted as a later addition, composed primarily in south India, then the proposition of Bhṛguisation does not seem to be tenable. Because it is very difficult to believe that the Bhṛgus maintained their hold on the *Mahābhārata*, if at all, for a period of a thousand years over the entire sub-continental space. Even if the southern version is taken as the work of the Bhṛgus of south India, its inclusion in the constituted text reveals larger participation of redactors, than the handiwork of just a clan. It is interesting to note that all those versions which are more sympathetic to Paraśurāma, viz. Akṛtavraṇa version in the *Mahābhārata* as well as *Bhāgavata* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas* do not give too much emphasis to the annihilation of kshatriyas. It is also noteworthy that the kshatriya-killing myth is mostly a part of *tīrtha*, ritual and caste myths.

In contrast to *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya*, north India seems to have responded to the arrogance of kshatriyas like Kārtavīrya through

the composition of *Kārtavīrya-Vāyu Saṃvada.*[11] This text occurs in a background of eulogies of gods in general, along with some specific individual deities, which are narrated in the preceding chapters. Along with this, the importance of kings and brahmanas are also described, including the importance of their *nāma-jāpa* and *kīrtana.* But the main focus of the text concerns the description of the glory and power of the brahmanas.

Two chapters in this portion of the *Mahābhārata* constitute a dialogue between Vāyu and Kārtavīrya, who had become very arrogant about his power and thought no god or brahmana could compete with him. He is clearly made to say that brahmanas are dependent on kings and live upon their alms and, therefore, brahmanas cannot be greater than kshatriyas. He asserts that times for brahmanas were considered great but now he has established the superiority of the kshatriyas. At this point Vāyu intervenes and gives a long discourse on how and why brahmanas are great. Vāyu gives him examples of Kaśyapa's saving the earth, Aṅgiras cursing fire, Gautama's cursing Indra, Aurva's destroying Tāljaṅghas and the achievements of Utathya, Vasiṣṭha, Agastya, Atri. Interestingly, Paraśurāma is not mentioned in this section but the last line warns Kārtavīrya that he is going to face great danger from the Bhṛgus. Therefore, this composition has been consciously prepared as a curtainraiser for the coming event, perhaps long after the myth of Kārtavīrya's arrogance and killing had been developed.

Before this *saṃvāda* begins, Bhīṣma recalls that due to the grace of Dattātreya only Kārtavīrya had become powerful, but after that he started undermining the brahmanas. This section makes the point very clear, that if Kārtavīrya propitiates brahmanas like he did to Dattātreya, he could win the world but if he dared to fight the brahmanas he would perish. This was another way in which the Kārtavīrya myth was put to use by the redactors of the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas. This myth of brahmanical supremacy has been composed from a *varṇa* perspective more than *gotra* or clan perspective.

Notwithstanding the above, it must be noted that the *Mahābhārata* repeats the annihilation of kshatriyas through ślokas like '*triḥsaptakṛtvaḥ pṛthivī kṛtā niḥkṣatriyā purā* [12] or *triḥsaptakṛtvaḥ pṛthivīm kṛtavā niḥkṣatriyām prabhuḥ* [13] nearly ten times. Sukthankar calls it the most favourite slogan of the bards that was repeated scores of times.[14] But four reiterations are inside the Paraśurāma narrative and given the vast expanse of the epic, the remaining six do not look to be so large as to call it a virtual slogan of the bards. These occurrences offer two possibilities. One, these repetitions may have occurred due to the general nature of the epic, which is full of decimation and routing of kshatriyas. Therefore, even a brahmanical myth which had the potential of that kind was harmonised in the epic. Alternatively, it may reflect a trend existing before the composition of the Purāṇas when brahmanas were less uncomfortable with this kind of depiction of brahmanical prowess in warfare.

As far as the Purāṇas are concerned, accounts of the killings of the kshatriyas, inside the narrative of the Paraśurāma myth, are not given any emphasis. It is mostly the stereotyped recall of the extermination of entire kshatriya race from the earth.[15] For example, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* spends more verses on war with Kārtavīrya and adds a couple of lines on the killing of kshatriyas thrice seven times.[16] The *Padma Purāṇa* says, "The valorous Rāma made the entire world clear of the kshatriyas, but protected only the very great family of Ikṣavāku, due to its being the family to which his maternal grand father was related, and due to his mother's word."[17] The *Brahma Purāṇa*[18] also repeats the usual one line statement. *Viṣṇu*, *Vāyu* and *Matsya* Purāṇas do not even mention the above concerns because in this context their main focus is Kārtavīrya's Yadu dynasty. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* presents the most curious narrative in this context which does not even mention the kshatriya annihilation; rather, it presents them as demons to be executed by Paraśurāma in two rounds at the order of the gods, which is certainly influenced by the avatāra ideology.[19] This also reflects a kind of unwillingness on the part of brahmans to recite the story of kshatriya annihilation in the presence of the

kshatriyas and as a result they might have camouflaged it as a divine act of the gods against demons.

It appears that the kshatriya-killing myth was not perpetuated strictly and exclusively as part of the Paraśurāma myth or the Bhṛgu myth; rather, this symbolism was used by all brahmanas to project general brahmanical supremacy as well as to rationalise the *tīrtha* and *dāna* myths. It was also propagated by other *varṇas* to provide legitimacy to their numerous caste origin myths. The repeated emphasis on the question of the surviving kshatriyas also points to that direction. Both the Kārtavīrya-killing and Kshatriya annihilation myths have been presented in the service of miscellaneous projects which got translated into at least four major clusters of the Paraśurāma myth. It is striking to note that there seems to be a race for grabbing the credit of his major mythical acts and an attempt to turn Paraśurāma into a mere agent of other forces. It reveals how, through reinterpretation and grafting of other myths and without disturbing the apparent flow of the main narrative, a myth is transformed to suit another social agenda [see Table 5].

Table 5: Multiple Contexts and Agenda of Paraśurāma Myths

	Kārtvīrya Killing		Kshatriya Annihilation	
Act	1. Aggrieved hero kills an oppressive ruler	2. A righteous ruler killed due to a curse and sin of sons	1. Tormentors of brahmanas punished	2. Oppressive Kshatriyas annihilated
Credit	Paraśurāma	Āpava Vasiṣṭha	Brahmanas	Viṣṇu
Myths	Paraśurāma cult Lineage myths	Kārtavīrya glorification myths	*Tīrtha*, caste and ritual myths	Avatāra Myths
Versions	Akṛtavraṇa version in Āraṇyakaparva	Śrī Kṛṣṇa version in Śāntiparva	Ugraśravā version in Ādiparva; *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* narrative in Droṇaparva	Purāṇas

2. The Ritual and Donation Myths

After the extermination of Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna and the entire kshatriya race, according to most versions, Paraśurāma performed certain rituals and offered donations to brahmanas, which became a very important component of his mythical cycle. Although the first post-killing act was oblation to the manes in the pool of blood created through these killings, later on, the act of donation of the earth became the most significant and attractive myth for subsequent redactors.

This myth of oblation of blood has been emphasised in all accounts related to *tīrthas*. The oblation of blood is supposed to be an impure act, but Bhārgava Rāma was so full of anger that after destroying all kshatriyas of the earth twenty-one times, he made five pools of blood in Samantapañchaka. Standing in the midst of these pools, Rāma offered oblation to the manes until his ancestor Ṛchika appeared before him and stopped him from perpetrating further violence. Interestingly, the Śri Kṛṣṇa version does not mention this oblation or the appearance of *pitṛs*. But Akṛtavraṇa version and many other references to the creation of *tīrthas* at Rāmahṛda or Samantapañchaka refer to it. However, there is not much difference between these versions.

The seed of this myth might have come from the *Aurvopākhyāna* and, therefore, from the Bhṛgu tradition itself. But, once created, it had great scope for projecting an ideal stereotype donor on the occasion of *śrāddha*. Therefore, it seems that in the later period this myth of oblation and donation was pressed in to the service of the promotion of *śrāddha* and *tīrtha* narratives on a large scale by the brahmana communities. It also shows how myths and rituals were combined in the Indian tradition. For example, the *Padma Purāṇa*[20] narrates that while fighting Kārtavīrya, Paraśurāma told him "....I shall kill all best kings for [i.e. as a revenge of] my father's murder. To my [dead] father I shall offer Kārtavīrya's blood mixed with sesame-seed, and shall offer the *piṇḍa* with his lotus head." The *Brahma Purāṇa* relates, "After making the earth devoid of kshatriyas, Paraśurāma of great fame

performed a horse sacrifice in order to dispel his sins."[21] The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* gives more attention to the ritual of *śrāddha* performed by Paraśurāma than his horse sacrifice.[22] It says that he not only performed such a ritual at Samantapañchaka but also visited Gayā and Chandrapāda. It is noteworthy that Kurukṣetra or Samantapañchaka is still famous for *śrāddha* rituals.

Similarly, the myth of performance of sacrifice is also not very uncommon among these versions. The Akṛtavraṇa version says that after oblation to the manes, Paraśurāma performed a sacrifice like Indra. The Śrī Kṛṣṇa version specifies that Rāma performed the *aśvamedha* sacrifice. Perhaps that was a reason for future redactors to declare him king. The *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* myth says that he performed more than one hundred sacrifices. But most of the Purāṇas do not mention the performance of sacrifices. However, the *Padma Purāṇa* says that "having made the earth clear of kshatriyas, he duly performed the great horse sacrifice." [23]

The myth associated with *dāna* by Paraśurāma after the great sacrifice became a prominent element and existed as an autonomous myth. In fact, on the western coast of India, land-donation and land-creation myths became so important that the Kārtavīrya-killing myth was overshadowed by them and they became the central myth of the Paraśurāma legend in this area.[24]

The Akṛtavraṇa version gives a detailed account of donation made by Paraśurāma after performing a great sacrifice. It says that he made a huge altar of gold, which was donated to his chief priest Kaśyapa [after completion of the sacrifice]. Kaśyapa distributed it among brahmanas who divided it amongst themselves by cutting it into pieces and hence they were called *khāṇḍavāyaṇas*. This myth of donation of the golden altar does not find frequent reference in other accounts. However, it is repeatedly stated that Bhārgava Rāma donated immense wealth to brahmanas. Perhaps this myth of gold donation was utilised by or alternatively developed by *tīrtha* myths, where it is said that if one takes a bath in this *tīrtha* of Bhārgava Rāma, then he gets a lot of gold.[25]

Most of the references in the context of the donation myth put emphasis on the donation of the earth, which is also related to the

myth of land creation on the western coast. The Akṛtavraṇa version says that Paraśurāma donated the entire earth to Kaśyapa in this sacrifice and went away to live on Mount Mahendra. The Śāntiparva version makes some addition to it by saying that after receiving the entire earth as *dāna*, Kaśyapa asked Paraśurāma to leave his territory [i.e. the territory which has been donated by Paraśurāma to him recently] and should never step into it. He did it in order to save some of the surviving kshatriyas. In this way Kaśyapa is projected as a saviour of various dynasties.

Significantly, Kaśyapa directs him towards the southern seacoast by taking *śruva* [ladle] in his hand. When Paraśurāma reached the sea coast the ocean automatically vacated an area for him. In the local tradition of the western coast, it is said that Paraśurāma threw his *śruva* in the direction of the ocean and Varuṇa got scared. So Varuṇa was defeated by Paraśurāma and he forcefully got a land vacated for himself. The vacated land was Śūrpāraka. But in this myth the entire credit is attributed to Kaśyapa. His indication through *śruva* created Śūrpāraka where Paraśurāma lived. Therefore, it is quite clear that this myth was created and added by Kaśyapas themselves who not only projected themselves as the saviour of kshatriyas but also the creator of land.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[26] does not mention the donation of the entire earth to Kaśyapa. Instead, the distribution is: Eastern quarter to *hotṛ*, Southern quarter to *brahmā*, Western to *adhvaryu* and the Northern to *udagātṛ*. To others he donated [lands in] the intermediate quarters, and the central portion of the earth to sage Kaśyapa, Āryavarta to *Upadṛṣṭas* and the land laying beyond that to *sadasyas* [superintendents of sacrifice].

The *Padma Purāṇa*[27] says, "He gave the earth with the seven islands to chief brahmanas ...went to the hermitage of Nara-Nārāyaṇa to practise penance." *Vāyu*, *Matsya* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* do not mention anything about it. But the *Brahma Purāṇa* says, "In the course of this sacrifice, the scion of the family of Bhṛgu gave the earth as a gift unto Kaśyapa, the son of Marichi. In this sacrifice precious articles were offered as gifts. Paraśurāma, the most excellent among those who fought, gave elephants, horses,

chariots, gold and cows as gifts in that horse sacrifice. For the welfare of the worlds ... stays even today on the most excellent mountain Mahendra like a deva."[28] It does not mention the land creation myth; neither is Kaśyapa in that all powerful image as in the previous account. The *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* simply mentions that Paraśurāma "made a gift of the entire earth to the high-souled Kaśyapa ... in the Mahendra mountain even today Paraśurāma shines in all glory and splendour." [29]

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* also talks about the horse-sacrifice and the donation of the earth to the Kaśyapas but says that Paraśurāma does not give away Mahendra parvat because he saved it for his own residence.[30] The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* devotes two chapters on the land creation myth where it is portrayed how Paraśurāma claimed land through his prowess and valour after defeating Varuṇa. [31]

Why did Paraśurāma Donate Land to Kaśyapa?

It is important to find out the significance of Paraśurāma's donation of the entire earth to Kaśyapa. Was this myth of land donation created by the Kāśyapas themselves? Without ruling out this possibility it should be noted that the donation of the entire earth after conquering it originates in the *Brāhmaṇas.* The gift of the whole earth to the officiating priest can be found in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*[32] and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa.*[33] In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa,* the king Viśvakarman Bhauvana, after conquering the earth, performed the horse sacrifice and offered the entire earth in *dakṣiṇā* to his officiating priest, Kaśyapa. Interestingly, the earth refused to be given in *dakṣiṇā* because in the absence of a kshatriya king she would plunge into the nether world.[34] This kind of mythical symbolism has occurred time and again in the epic and Purāṇas, which has an inherent motive that the earth cannot be sustained without the kshatriyas who were supposed to protect her and *dharma.* For example, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* the same story is repeated in the context of *Sarvamedha.* Even Arjuna Kārtavīrya donated the entire earth after conquering it and performing the *aśvamedha* sacrifice.

A similar motif has also been used in the context of Paraśurāma. Kaśyapa, being a Prajāpati, may stand for all the brahmanas and not just one *gotra* of this *varṇa*.[35] When Kaśyapa was given the earth as *dakṣiṇā*, he bestowed her on the brahmanas since Paraśurāma had destroyed all the kshatriyas of the earth, and Kaśyapa retired to the forest which meant that the earth was deprived of a king and, therefore, it started sinking to the nether world. There she met Kaśyapa again, who arrested her fall and she asked for a king to save her.[36] Therefore, the donation of the earth has the inherent symbolism of the end of order, resulting in chaos, a kind of *pralaya* or destruction to be revived by another creation—which is also the main function of the avatāra.

The myth of sin incurred by Paraśurāma due to the annihilation of the kshatriyas and *dāna* of the earth has been utilised by redactors of the *Mahābhārata* in several ways. It seems that various elements of the Paraśurāma myths were being continuously transmuted through the centuries and even up to fairly recent times by redactors to promote *dāna* and *tīrtha* and it became a tool of brahmanical consolidation. By early medieval times the *śrāddha* had become the most important occasion to procure *dāna* from ordinary householders. The Paraśurāma myth was ideally suited for that occasion because it combined *śrāddha* of his father Jamadagni and sin incurred through innumerable killings of kshatriya clans.

Paraśurāma-Vasiṣṭha Saṃvāda[37] is also situated in a similar kind of textual context, where at the end of war countless soldiers are killed. This provided the opportunity for incorporating the myth and instruction for *dāna* on the occasion of *śrāddha*. It should be noted that myths of Paraśurāma in various *parvas* are related to specific themes of those *parvas*. For example, Tīrthayātrāparva talks about *tīrtha*-related myths of Paraśurāma and Bhīṣma and Karṇaparvas deal with his myth related to being a great warrior and teacher of military science.

The *saṃvāda* under reference tries to highlight the greatness of donation of gold. It says that even after the great sacrifice and donation of the earth, Paraśurāma could not get rid of his sins and could not fully regain his lustre. Then Vasiṣṭha narrates to him a

long story about creation of gold which is also associated with the story of the birth of Kārttikeya. Vasiṣṭha advises him that the donation of gold will make him sinless. Paraśurāma follows the advice of Vasiṣṭha and becomes sinless and lustrous again. This myth not only uses Paraśurāma's image as a big sinner but mobilises this myth to promote the *dāna* of gold to brahmanas. Therefore, this myth does not focus on the achievements of Paraśurāma but uses it to promote a general brahmanic theme of *dāna*. This dimension of the use and focus of myths become completely clear in another reference to the Paraśurāma myth in the Dānadharmaparva.[38] This is part of a dialogue between Indra and Bṛhaspati on why the donation of land is the greatest among all *dānas*. It says, just as the light of the moon increases every day, donated land gives religious merit as many times as the earth yields crops. It was said that the ancients used to sing a saga related to the donation of land and Jāmadagneya Rāma, after listening to this saga, donated the entire earth to Kaśyapa. In that saga it is said [earth says] give only me in *dāna*, receive only me, you can get something only by donating me, because whatever man donates in his life, only that he receives back in the other world. It was also said that "brahmanas who recite this saga sung by the earth on the occasion of *śrāddha* ceremony, achieves the absolute state or *brahmabhāva*". Thus multiple uses and foci of the Paraśurāma myths become more intelligible in this background.

3. The Lineage Myth

The most unbrahmanical behaviour of Paraśurāma, i.e. the killing of a king and the entire kshatriya race, the performance of the horse sacrifice and the *dāna* of wealth and the earth must have posed several sociological problems for the ancient and medieval law-makers. In a society that gave utmost importance to the preservation of and strict adherence to the *varṇa* order, it became a difficult proposition to rationalise Paraśurāma's kshatriya-like behaviour. Therefore, it became essential for myth-makers to provide certain justifications for this aberrant behaviour, which is reflected in two very important myths in the *Mahābhārata*. The

first myth revolves around the *exchange of Charu* between Satyavatī and her mother, and the other is named as *Chyavana-Kuśika Saṃvāda*, which tries to explain the reasons for violation of *varṇa* norms. Apart from this, it is also possible that these two myths were somehow linked with the origin of mixed-castes or *varṇasaṃkaras*. This might have been a part of the caste origin myths of certain communities. While the Paraśurāma myth was perhaps a product of the Bhṛgu tradition, the lineage myth, in all probability, was a product of different groups of redactors.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Paraśurāma's lineage myth occurs twice in the Āraṇyaka and the Śāntiparva versions of this legend.[39] Both these versions are almost the same in this regard, yet some minor differences creep in here too. For example, the Āraṇyakaparva states that Gādhi went to the forest and begot a girl named Satyavatī. However, according to the Śāntiparva actually Kuśik went to the forest and due to his severe penance Indra himself was born to him as Gādhi, and later Gādhi got a daughter named Satyavatī who was married to Ṛchika. The Āraṇyaka introduces another myth related to the marriage, in which Ṛchika was asked for one thousand peculiar-coloured horses whose ears were white on one side and black on the other. He procured such horses from Varuṇa. The place from where these horses appeared in the sea is called Aśvatīrtha. Again, this myth shows linkages with the creation of *tīrtha*. The other difference is associated with the preparation of *Charu*. While in the Āraṇyaka version Bhṛgu gave *Charu* to Satyavatī, in the Śāntiparva *Charu* is given by Ṛchika himself. Similarly, while the Āraṇyaka version says that Satyavatī's mother cheated her by exchanging their *Charu*, the Śāntiparva says that it happened in ignorance. The essential components of the story-line of both these versions are the same but the Śāntiparva adds some such verses that enhance the mystical power of Ṛchika. For example, Satyavatī says to Ṛchika, "If you so desire you can create an entire new world, what about a son according to your own desire". Ṛchika replies: "I have never spoken a lie even jokingly, so it cannot be false." It has been viewed that these kinds of claims are more in tune with Puranic literature.[40] This could also be a

reason why the Śāntiparva version should be considered the later one as compared to the Āraṇyaka version. The study of minor differences between the two versions helps us to assess the closeness of a particular Puranic version to one of them.

In the Purāṇas, wherever this myth occurs, it is a part of *vaṃśānucharita* and not of the Paraśurāma legend. Actually the basic motive of this myth in the Purāṇas is to explain the reason why Viśvāmitra became a brahmana. The Vasiṣṭha–Viśvāmitra conflict myth was another such attempt to explain such a phenomenon. It seems that different communities and groups of redactors provided different interpretations-cum-explanatory myths to justify their own social agenda. In the Purāṇas this myth occurs in the section dealing with the descriptions of the lunar race of kings which started from Buddha's son Som and grandson Pururava's lineage. In this family of the lunar race of kings came Kuśika and Gādhi, in whose connection this myth is inserted. There are differences between the Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata,* and among the Purāṇas themselves on this issue.

In the *Brahma Purāṇa,*[41] there is more emphasis on Ṛchika and Jamadagni while Paraśurāma is just mentioned in passing at the end without any significance. Here Reṇukā is mentioned as Kamali who is the daughter of Reṇu. In this text Satyavatī's mother exchanged *Charu* unknowingly and not as part of a conscious scheme. It does not even mention any nuptial gift. Therefore, this is closer to the Śāntiparva version of the *Mahābhārata.* There is the centrality of *Charu* exchange event in this version. In most of the Purāṇas it is said that after giving birth to a son, Satyavatī became the Kauśikī river. This myth does not occur in the *Mahābhārata.* Therefore, it seems to be a later addition. Perhaps it was worked out based on the myth that Viśvāmitra did penance on the bank of the river Kauśikī or Kośī. Here Ṛchika is called the son of Kāvya at one place and a little later he is said to be the son of Aurva. This textual inconsistency makes us believe that it was composed by someone who was neither very careful nor conscious about the Bhṛgu tradition.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*[42] also has an almost similar narrative. Even its language, symbols and tone are similar, especially if one considers all aspects of the *Charu* exchange and Satyavatī's conversion into the Kauśikī river. But Reṇukā alias Kamali's father is named Suveṇu. However, the *Vāyu* version seems to be a clearer and an earlier account. The *Charu* myth seems to have been utilised also to prove the cultic superiority of the Vaiṣṇavas. While the *Vāyu Purāṇa* says, "Formerly, when there was an interchange of Raudra and Vaiṣṇava *Charus* in the *yajña* of Bhṛgu, he devoured *Jamanāt* or the Vaiṣṇava fire and so he came to be known as 'Jamadagni'."[43] But the *Brahma Purāṇa* says, "It was due to the change of *Charu* pertaining to Indra and Viṣṇu given by Bhṛgu. Jamadagni was born due to the sacrifice performed in the half pertaining to Viṣṇu..."[44]

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* talks about the unwillingness of Gādhi to marry Satyavatī with Ṛchika and thus laid down the condition of securing a thousand peculiar horses as nuptial gift. This was duly fulfilled by Ṛchika who then married Satyavatī. Here the *Charu* exchange is deliberate, but Ṛchika prepares the *Charu* himself. So this version in its two major components is similar to the Akṛtavraṇa version of this myth. Although some favourable treatment is given to Satyavatī's mother, the basic framework remains the same. Just like the *Brahma Purāṇa* here too Reṇukā's father is named Reṇu and her son Rāma is proclaimed to be the avatāra of Viṣṇu. Satyavatī became the Kauśikī river in this version too.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*[45] differs on three points in its narrative: First, it identifies Aurva and Ṛchika as the same person; second, it does not talk about nuptial gift to Gādhi; and third, the *Charu* is prepared by Ṛchika himself and not Bhṛgu. It also alleges the mother to be responsible for this interchange of *Charu* and the tree. In fact, to explain the unbrahmanical behaviour of Paraśurāma this text tries to combine several myths, such as the *Charu* exchange myth, Kuśika-Chyavana myth, Āpava Vasiṣṭha curse myth and the myth of Paraśurāma as an avatāra of the Sun god. However, all these exercises lead to the idea of humanization of Paraśurāma

and denial of his divine status. The myth of Paraśurāma could be divided into three phases of its evolution. The first phase is represented by his rise as a hero, the second phase by his apotheosis as god and avatāra and lastly, his re-humanization as a sage. This mythical composition belongs to the third and later phase of its development. This is the phase when we find more emphasis on his being a devotee of Śiva. This Purāṇa is certainly a *Vaiṣṇava* Purāṇa, but we do not know why this text is bent on proving that Paraśurāma was a devotee of Śiva and due to his grace he killed all kshatriyas/demons. It seems some sects of the Vaiṣṇavas were desperate to get rid of this uncomfortable figure.

In the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[46] the nuptial gift and the *Charu* exchange are mentioned just like in the *Brahma* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇas*. But there is no detail about the hugging of the *Udumbara* and *aśvattha* trees in this version. It is noteworthy that except for the Akṛtavraṇa version, all versions name Ṛchika as one the who prepared the *Charu*. Satyavatī became the Kuśikī river and Jamadagni married Reṇukā, the daughter of Reṇu. The most important thing about the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* version is that the *Charu* exchange episode is a part of the Paraśurāma myth and not that of the description of the Lunar race of kings, as it is in various other Purāṇas mentioned earlier. It reasserts the point that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* ascribes a relatively more important place to Paraśurāma than other Purāṇas.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa,* which otherwise gives a comprehensive treatment to the myths of Paraśurāma, does not recount the myth of *Charu* exchange. This Purāṇa introduces us to the lineage and family of Paraśurāma in a unique way wherein Paraśurāma visits all his grandfathers in ascending order of generation. First he visits his father Jamadagni, then Ṛchika, Chyavana and Bhṛgu. Therefore, apart from two important versions of the *Mahābhārata*, only the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* mentions this myth as a part of the Paraśurāma myth. In most of the Purāṇas, it is some kind of lineage myth of the kshatriya clan of Kuśika. The *Matsya*, *Narasiṃha*, *Viṣṇu* and *Padma Purāṇas* do not mention this myth at all.

It should be underlined here that the myth of *Charu* exchange does not try to establish the complete genealogy of the Bhṛgus. Rather, it just begins from Ṛchika and ends with Paraśurāma. Therefore, the focus of this myth is to explain the inter-mixture of castes or aberrant *varṇa* behaviour of two important mythical personalities, namely Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra. Second, it does not seem to be a product of the Bhṛgu tradition. That is because the Bhṛgus had a long tradition of warrior-like activities and it would not have been necessary for them to invent such a myth to justify the kshatriya-like behaviour of Paraśurāma.

Moreover, this branch of the Bhṛgus had a consistent tradition of marriages with kshatriyas. For example, Chyavana was married to Sukanyā, Devayānī to Yayāti, Ṛchika to Satyavatī and Jamadagni to Reṇukā. Therefore, even if they needed an explanation for the origin, it could have mentioned the entire tradition. It does not seem to be the conscious work of Bhṛgu redactors. Rather, it seems to be a kind of explanation for the origin of the Kauśika brahmanas, because in the Śāntiparva, Ṛchika says to Satyavatī after knowing about the *Charu* exchange that he foresaw that her father's family will become that of brahmanas. This will become more clear if the *Chyavana-Kuśika Saṃvāda* is taken into account.

The Chyavana–Kuśika dialogue is located in the Dānadharmaparva of Anuśāsanaparva, which discusses many issues related to the duties of various *varṇa* and ashrams, viz. inheritance, rights of sons and *varṇasaṃkaras*[47] and the *saṃvāda* is also situated there. The first two chapters of this section mainly highlight the importance of the cow, especially donation of the cow or *godāna*. Thereafter, Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma why both Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra were aberrations in their families. This myth is more elaborate and slightly complicated than the *Charu* exchange myth. It has a typical Puranic texture, where the magical power of the brahmanas has been boosted. Apart from that, the whole story is written in the future tense, viz. Chyavana came to know that a great impurity is about to come in his clan from the Kuśika family and, therefore, he thought that he will burn the entire Kuśika family. This myth also presumes all other parts of the

Paraśurāma myth available beforehand. Except for the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* this myth has no other version in any other text, which underlines the limited spread of this myth.

According to this myth, when Chyavana foresaw imminent danger from the Kuśikas then he wanted to find a suitable opportunity to curse and burn the entire Kuśika clan. Therefore, Chyavana went to Kuśika and in the name of observing a complicated vow through various irritating, erratic and discourteous behaviour, tested the patience of the king and queen. But the king and queen were so polite and humble that Chyavana could not find any opportunity to give vent to his rage. Instead, he ended up giving them a boon that a descendant of Kuśika, i.e. Viśvāmitra would become a brahmana. Chyavana also narrates a large part of the Bhṛgu mythology in the future tense. The focus of this narrative in Chapters 52–53 of this *parva* is to present an image of the ideal householder. It exemplifies how a householder should serve the brahmanas and what are the virtues of tolerating even the eccentricities of a brahmana priest without complaining. Chapter 54 conveys the message that the magical power of the brahmanas is actually much greater than the earthly wealth of the kshatriyas. The magical power of the brahamanas can create wealth if they so desire, but despite having such a power *ṛṣis* prefer to do penance and not enjoy worldly wealth. Simultaneously, if the brahmanas are made happy they can give unparalleled boons. In fact, at one place Kuśika is made to say in so many words: "It is the power of the brahmanas that yoked us to the chariot."[48] The main motive of this entire facade is made clear in Chapter 55, where Chyavana says to Kuśika, "Your desire will be fulfilled and from Kuśika, a brahmana clan will originate."[49] The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*[50] has a smaller version of this narrative than the *Mahābhārata*. This story is narrated by Ṛchika to Satyavati as an explanation to the act of *Charu* exchange. He said that since Chyavana had long given word to Kuśika, therefore your father's family certainly have a person of brahmanical quality.

The Chyavana–Kuśika *saṃvāda* has the typical tone of a caste myth. It deserves special note that if Viśvāmitra was indeed the

first brahmana in this line, then why did the clan come to be named after the kshatriya Kuśika and not Viśvāmitra. In all probability this myth was authored or at least patronised by the clan of Kauśika brahmanas and their priests, who might have moved socially upward at a certain point of history. The ascetic image of Viśvāmitra is part of Vedic tradition itself and does not need any explanation from such a myth of the Kuśika brahmana. It may be suggested that it is some kind of a caste myth which tried to justify the intermixture of the Kshatriyas and brahmanas and rationalises this *varṇasaṃkara*. To sum up, we have two important myths related to the issue of lineage but none of them is primarily concerned with Paraśurāma. Rather, the myths of Paraśurāma have been used to justify the social position of a category of *brahmakṣatras*. This proves that the myth of Paraśurāma has been put to various uses and in order to achieve that an entire network of myths have been created around Paraśurāma and his mythical ancestors. In some cases these myths are developed to highlight the importance of *dāna* and at other times they are used to boast the powers of mighty brahmanas.

4. The Matricide Myth

The myth related to the killing of his mother Reṇukā by Paraśurāma has been one of the most prominent aspects of his personality in popular perception. Surprisingly, very few Puranic texts and versions of his myth deal with this aspect of his legend. In fact there are indications that a conscious effort was made in the Purāṇas to suppress the myth of the killing of Reṇukā by Paraśurāma.[51] It became a popular theme only in the late Sthalapurāṇas of south India and there it played a crucial role in the penetration of the Paraśurāma cult in the marginal communities. Thus it helped the transformation of the Paraśurāma myth into a popular cult. But as far as ancient and early medieval texts are concerned, very few provide enough details about it.

Interestingly, the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version does not even mention this myth. The first occurrence of this can be found in the Akṛtavraṇa version. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* also presents this myth

almost in similar terms. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[52] presents this myth with a slightly different tone, but essentially with the same content. It is surprising that although the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* attempts to recount the entire Paraśurāma narrative, with extensive elaborations, it does not mention any account on this myth. However, the redactor of this Purāṇa seems to be familiar with the myth of matricide because at one place Śiva in disguise taunts Paraśurāma by saying that he is a mother killer.

The *Reṇukā Māhātmya,* which is supposed to be a part of the *Skanda Purāṇa* and believed to be a text of a very late period [possibly 16th –17th centuries] obviously deals with this myth. This narrative is closer to folk culture than to the shastraic tradition of early India. There are some other references to Reṇukā in the epic and Puranic texts[53] but since they do not provide a detailed account of the matricide myth, therefore, these will be not discussed for the time being.

The Āraṇyakaparva situates this episode between the marriage of Jamadagni and the killing of Kārtavīrya. But the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* changes the sequence of events slightly and puts this event after the slaying of Kārtavīrya and the annihilation of the kshatriyas. Therefore, this is made out to be a late event in the life of the family of Paraśurāma. These versions provide minor differences in the account of the event, e.g. Āraṇayakaparva does not specify the river where Reṇukā went to take a bath; the *Bhāgavata* says that she went to the Gaṅgā to fetch water for sacrificial worship, i.e. *homa* and not for a bath. In the *Mahābhārata* the sporting king is named as Chitraratha, the ruler of Mṛttikavati; but in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Chitraratha is the king of Gandharvas who was sporting in the water with celestial nymphs and not his queen as in the *Mahābhārata.* In the Āraṇyakaparava, Reṇukā falls unconscious in the water due to a feeling of desire and returns home unsettled, without anticipation of any danger. But in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* she hastens back home after spending a long time gazing at the sporting king and is afraid of Jamadagni's curse. In both these versions Jamadagni suspects the infidelity of his wife.

The *Mahābhārata* version names all the sons of Jamadagni who were ordered to kill their mother but the *Bhāgavata* does not mention the names. The deed is done by Paraśurāma, who kills his mother at the order of his father. The *Bhāgavata* narrates that he killed all his brothers also along with his mother while in the Āraṇyakaparva and the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* Jamadagni curses all his sons to become idiots, which has some similarity with the Viśvāmitra myth, when he cursed all his sons to become idiots and caṇḍālas. Perhaps this emphasis was added to highlight the obedience of Paraśurāma towards his father. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* says that Paraśurāma was fully aware of the powers of his father and his capacity to return his mother and brothers to life, therefore he obeyed his father. The Āraṇyakaparva does not provide any such apology or justification. Moreover, in the Āraṇyakaparva, Paraśurāma begs for various boons, including making his mother come alive, erasing the memory of this killing, normalisation of his brothers, a long life and a victory in war for himself. However, the *Bhāgavata* mentions only one boon, i.e. life of his mother and brothers as well as erasing the memory of this act. It is quite possible that since the Āraṇyaka version attributes his prowess in war to the boon given by his father, therefore it elaborately describes those boons; while the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* presents Paraśurāma as an avatāra who does not need any boon from any one. The idea of boon does not go well with the narrative of an *avatāra*.

In the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*,[54] Jamadagni gives a boon of invincibility in war and asks him to choose any other boon he wants. Then Paraśurāma asks for revival of his mother and brothers without any remembrance of the past event. However, Jamadagni adds that when Rāma of Raghu dynasty meets you then your task will be over and your lustre of Viṣṇu will leave you and join with him. Then he asks Paraśurāma to visit Śiva. Therefore this narrative is certainly composed after appropriation of Paraśurāma myth in the Dāśarathī Rāma and Śiva cycle of myths.

On the whole, the Āraṇyaka version is a more direct narrative and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* introduces several small elements to

justify the acts perpetrated by Paraśurāma. Thus some reasoning was added to the narrative, e.g. Jamadagni becomes angry, because his time fixed for his sacrificial worship had elapsed; or Rāma killed all his family members, because he knew that they will be alive again, etc. This version of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* shows the development of a kind of guilt for this type of act in this legend. As a result of this development, this myth created an image of the *pitṛbhakta* Rāma who could go to any length to obey his father. This attribute of Paraśurāma is highlighted in several literary references. For example, the Dharmavyādha story in the Mārkaṇḍeya Samasyāparva,[55] where Dharmavyādha's parents say that their son is as faithful to them as Paraśurāma was to his parents. The *Padma Purāṇa* narrates that when Rāma ordered Lakṣamaṇa to leave Sītā alone in the forest, the aggrieved Lakṣamaṇa thought, "Jamadagni's son even killed his mother by the orders of his father. The order of an elderly person, whether it is proper or improper, is not at all to be disobeyed."[56]

All references to the matricide myth are not very favourable. For example, in the *Mahābhārata*, Chirkari Gautama is ordered by his father to kill his mother but Chirkari takes time to think and passes his time outside the house till the evening. When the *ṛṣi*, his father returns in the evening and finds that his order has not been carried out, he becomes very happy because by that time his anger has vanished. This narrative emphasises that one should reason for himself before executing an order. Therefore, this is a comment on mindless obedience and hence shows the Paraśurāma episode in negative light. It is worth mentioning here that in the Śaiva texts the matricide myth has been utilised to denigrate the Paraśurāma *avatāra* of Viṣṇu [see next chapter].

The causes of the construction of this myth of matricide are very obscure. In order to understand it, we either have to accept it as a real historical event or must find an explanation for its creation and perpetuation. It is difficult to link it with any tradition of the mother sacrifice cult or ritual prevalent among the Bhārgavas, because nothing to that effect is mentioned in any text. There are some instances of killing of women in Indian

mythology. For example, Viṣṇu killed the wife of Bhṛgu and Rāma killed Tāḍkā. But even that does not provide enough reason for this kind of myth. So far as myths of infidelity of wives are concerned, there are so many myths in which fallen wives are turned into stone or cursed or condemned by their *ṛsi* husbands, but even that does not justify a highly prohibited act like killing one's wife or mother.

One could argue that it was to project the image of Paraśurāma as *pitṛbhakta*. Obviously, that is the result of the myth and it is highly doubtful if it was the cause of its creation as Paraśurāma had been humiliated due to this myth and also lost some prestige in the divine kingdom. So much so that certain versions try to cover up the real nature of this killing by adding several justifications to it and attempt to portray that it was not a matricide at all, because Paraśurāma knew that she will soon be alive.

The most important possibility is that Reṇukā was a pre-existing goddess, perhaps linked to the cult of ant-hill worship,[57] who was humanised and incorporated in the Bhṛgu genealogy. The ritual importance of the anthill is also indicated by Chyavana-Sukanyā myth of the Bhṛgus, in which defilement of the anthill by Sukanyā, daughter of King Śaryāti, attracted punishment from Chyavana.[58] Perhaps when the Paraśurāma myths reached south India, the similarity between Reṇukā and another anthill goddess Yellammā added many new dimensions to her narrative, including that of matricide.

In contrast to the causes of origin, the effect of its perpetuation is quite clear. It helped Paraśurāma to gain the status of a cult figure among the marginal communities of south India by integrating goddesses such as Mariammā and Yellammā within its own narrative. Perhaps that is the reason why there are so many folk versions of the matricide myth that are neglected in the texts of Sanskritic traditions. Reṇukā is largely mentioned only in the context of *tīrthas* in these texts, which will be discussed in the sixth and seventh chapters, along with other folk narratives. The matricide myth also falls in the category of myths that helped to expand the sphere of influence of the Paraśurāma myth. This myth

presumes that Paraśurāma is a ferocious warrior, therefore it must be later than the Kārtavīrya killing myth.

5. Paraśurāma and the Heroes of the *Mahābhārata*

Most of the references to Paraśurāma in the *Mahābhārata* are related to his being the guru of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa. These mighty warriors and some other characters are compared to Paraśurāma in valour or in his role as a spiritual instructor and peace maker. It is important that although he is not shown as participating in the main war of the epic, nor does he play any role in the course of its event, he is shown to have some kind of prior relationship with the three major personalities of this epic, namely, Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa. Most of these references pertain to the remembrance of his being the guru of these people.

Paraśurāma and Bhīṣma

As far as Paraśurāma's interface with Bhīṣma is concerned, the most important reference is to the war between the two described in the *Ambopākhyāna* and remembered at several places. Sukthankar viewed that "this titanic conflict between Bhīṣma and Bhārgava Rāma, which is said to have lasted for three and twenty days, is utterly barren of any result beyond adding a few hundred lines to the text".[59] However, for the understanding of the Paraśurāma myth as well as the rise and fall of his career, it is a significant episode. Perhaps it represents the period when the Paraśurāma myth had started to lose its grip over north India. This is reflected in his other myths too, where he is depicted in a lustreless and ordinary manner.

This story is narrated by Bhīṣma himself. It says that when Ambā was rejected by Śālva, whom she loved and wanted to marry, on account of her abduction by Bhīṣma, she left his kingdom and wandered alone in the forests. She was full of grief and vengeance. There she met a group of ascetics who sympathised with her and assured her that they would provide help. Suddenly, Ambā's maternal grandfather, the royal sage Hotravāhana came to that place and advised her to seek help from Rāma Jāmadagneya. While they

were talking among themselves, Rāma's disciple and faithful follower Akṛtavraṇa appeared on the scene. Akṛtavraṇa was told the story of Ambā. Akṛtavraṇa gave the verdict that in this case Bhīṣma is the culprit and responsible for Ambā's misfortune, so Bhīṣma should be punished.

The next morning Paraśurāma also reached. Ambā narrated the whole story of her tragic life again to Bhārgava Rāma and implored him to prosecute the offending Bhīṣma. After long deliberation, Paraśurāma accepted the task and proceeded to the banks of Sarasvati along with Ambā and all the assembled sages. He sent a message to Bhīṣma who came to meet him at the boundary of the Kuru kingdom. Rāma ordered Bhīṣma to take Ambā back or be prepared to fight a duel with him. Bhīṣma expressed his inability to take Ambā back and tried to explain his position. He also requested Paraśurāma not to engage in battle with his own disciple. But it was of no use. Bhīṣma went back to the city and came prepared with all his weapons and accessories. Bhīṣma's mother Gaṅgā tried to stop the imminent fight but failed. The fight lasted for several days. In this battle, alternately both combatants got wounded several times and fell down but soon recovered to resume the fight. Then one night Bhīṣma who was one of the Vasus in his last birth, saw in a dream a group of eight Vasus who reminded him of his magical missile, which could be fatal for Bhārgava Rāma.

The next day when the fight resumed, both warriors hurled at each other simultaneously the terrific *Brahmāstra,* which was capable of destroying the earth. But the two missiles clashed in the air and neutralised each other. Suddenly Bhīṣma remembered the missile which the Vasus had suggested to him in the dream. He prepared himself to discharge that lethal weapon but suddenly the gods intervened. Bhīṣma's mother Gaṅgā and the gods were trying to pacify the combatants. Seeing that neither of them was prepared to yield, the gods stood between the two and made the fight impossible. Finally, the *pitṛs* appeared and persuaded Rāma to lay aside his weapons, which he reluctantly did. This act led Bhīṣma to put down his bow and arrow too. He went to his guru

Rāma and prostrated before him. They soon forgot their quarrel and Paraśurāma praised Bhīṣma as an indomitable warrior.

The significance of this episode lies in those later compositions which symbolise the beginning of the decline of Paraśurāma as an invincible warrior. It is noteworthy that when Paraśurāma insists on battle with Bhīṣma, the latter says: "O Rāma, you boast that you defeated the kshatriyas of the entire world single-handedly but listen my answer to this: in those days Bhīṣma or any other kshatriya like me was not born. The real lustrous kshatriyas were born after that. You defeated only weak kshatriyas. Now I will destroy your arrogance".[60] After the end of the war the manes told Paraśurāma: "Dear son, you should not indulge in this kind of adventure any more. Now it is not good for you to get embroiled in war with Bhīṣma or other kshatriyas... On several occasions we have told you not to pick up arms. You have done something that should not have been done. War is the profession of the kshatriyas. You should indulge in the study of the Vedas and penance. You should back out of the war.[61] Adalbert Gail has also argued that this encounter and its outcome in the favour of Bhiṣma represents not so much a reassertion of kshatriya values as the reassertion of the values of *varṇāśramadharma*.[62] It seems that the defeat of Rāma Jāmadagneya at the hand of Rāma Dāśarathī was modelled on the myth of the defeat of Paraśurāma by Bhīṣma.

The *Mahābhārata* repeats the stereotyped references to this conflict on numerous occasions. For example, at several places Bhīṣma himself is made to remember this war. Once he says that when he was fighting with Paraśurāma, people had taken Vichitravīrya away from the kingdom due to the fear of Paraśurāma.[63] Arjuna says that only Dhṛṣṭadyumna can face Bhīṣma now, earlier only Paraśurāma had encountered Bhīṣma in war.[64] Similarly, Śikhaṇḍi[65] has been compared with Paraśurāma and Śikhaṇḍi tells Bhīṣma at one place that he knew about his fight with Paraśurāma, yet he wanted to fight with him.[66] Bhīṣma himself is made to say to Karṇa that when Paraśurāma could not do any harm to him, then how could Karṇa do him any harm.[67] It highlighted very prominently that Bhīṣma was a favourite and a

dear disciple of Paraśurāma and he gained all kinds of knowledge, especially the art of warfare from Paraśurāma and Indra.[68] But the oft-repeated line is the lamentation by Sañjaya, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Yudhiṣṭhira, Kṛṣṇa and by Gaṅgā at the time of the cremation of Bhīṣma, that "one who could not be killed by Paraśurāma had been killed by Śikhaṇḍi".[69]

Paraśurāma and Droṇa

Paraśurāma has been presented as the guru of Bhīṣma as well as Droṇāchārya. A detailed legend related to this has been narrated in the Ādiparva.[70] This has also been repeated at a few other places in the *Mahābhārata*.[71] This story is narrated by Vaiśampāyana to Janamejeya. The background of this story is related to the narrative about the torture and humiliation of the Pāṇḍavas by the Kauravas, especially the conspiracies of Duryodhana. King Dhṛtarāṣṭra became anxious about these and appointed Kṛpācārya and Droṇācārya as their teachers.

It is said that when Droṇa had finished his studies and took up the duties of a householder, he began to feel the pinch of poverty. He then happened to hear that Bhārgava Rāma was bestowing his wealth on brahmanas. Droṇa presented himself before Bhārgava Rāma and asked for some wealth for himself. Rāma confessed before him that whatever wealth he had at one time had been freely distributed among the brahmanas and that he had given away the earth to Kaśyapa and now he had nothing left except his mortal body, his weapons and magical missiles. He asked Droṇa to choose whatever he wanted. Droṇa chose the famous missiles with which Rāma had conquered the whole earth. Rāma not only gave those weapons to Droṇa but also instructed him in the use of the arms. It is apparent that this composition belongs to a period when all other important myths about Paraśurāma such as the image of the veteran warrior, donor of the earth, inhabitant of mount Mahendra, etc. were already popular.

Droṇa's discipleship of Paraśurāma has been remembered at some other places too. Droṇaparva[72] says that after learning the science of archery from Paraśurāma, Drona had imparted the entire

knowledge of the same to his son, Aśvatthāmā. At the death of Droṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra laments that it is painful to know that the same Droṇa who was made disciple by Paraśurāma and given the knowledge of archery and other weapons, who taught the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas... has been killed by Dhṛṣṭadyumna.[73]

Paraśurāma and Karṇa

The relationship between Karṇa and Paraśurāma is peculiar in the sense that on the one hand, Karṇa and his associates, specially Duryodhana, are shown to take immense pride in being disciples of Paraśurāma,[74] and on the other, he was cursed by Paraśurāma which proved fatal for him.[75] Therefore, almost all references to this relationship speak simultaneously about both these elements. Many minor references mention the weapons given to Karṇa by Paraśurāma, viz. the bow and arrow,[76] chariot and horses[77] and other weapons in general.[78] Apart from minor references, this relationship comes in two major versions–first in the Karṇaparva[79] and second in the Śāntiparva. Both versions have almost similar narratives but in the Śāntiparva some additions have also been made which are related to the curse of Karṇa. Nārada relates this story to Yudhiṣṭhira about how Karṇa incurred two curses which became fatal for him during his war with Arjuna.

During his training in weaponry, Karṇa realised that Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍavas were very powerful in the science of arms and archery. Therefore, one day he approached Droṇāchārya and requested him to teach the secrets of the Brahāmastra to him. But Droṇāchārya refused on the ground that only a celibate brahmana or a penancing kshatriya can learn this secret. Since he was neither, he was not a suitable candidate for receiving such an education. Then Karṇa went to Mount Mahendra and introduced himself as a Bhṛgu brahmana to Bhārgava Rāma. Bhārgava Rāma accepted him as his disciple and started teaching him archery. One day, when Karṇa was practising archery on the seashore, he ignorantly killed a sacrificial cow of a brahmana. The brahmana cursed him that he would also be killed in the battleground in the same way when he is not cautious enough and his chariot would get stuck in the ground.

One day, while Paraśurāma was walking around his hermitage with Karṇa, he felt very weak due to continuous fasting and desired to sleep in the Karṇa's lap. Just then, a ferocious looking insect came near Karṇa and bit his thigh deeply. Since Karṇa feared that his guru would get up and his sleep would be disturbed, he did not move an inch and let the insect sting him. When blood gushed out of his thigh and touched the face of Paraśurāma, he got up and said that he had become impure with the touch of blood. Paraśurāma inquired about the blood and Karṇa told him about the insect and Paraśurāma saw the ferocious insect. As Bhārgava's sight fell upon the insect, it died and a huge fierce monster stood in its place. The monster folded both his hands before Paraśurāma and thanked him that he had let him out of the hell to which he was cursed. Bhārgava asked him his identity and he said that he was a great *asura* named Daṃśa in *Satayuga* and he had forcefully abducted the wife of *ṛṣi* Bhṛgu. Therefore, Paraśurāma's grandfather Bhṛgu had cursed him and transformed him into a ferocious insect. When he begged pardon, Bhṛgu said to him that he would be liberated by Paraśurāma and that day had arrived. The story of Indra in the form of a centipede is not mentioned here in this story, as we find in the Śāntiparva.

When that demon left the place, Bhārgava Rāma turned to Karṇa and asked him about his own identity. He said a brahmana cannot have this kind of patience, it is typical of kshatriyas. Karṇa confessed that he was neither brahmana nor kshatriya but a man of *sūta* [lower caste] origin. He had lied to him in order to get the secret of the Brahmāstra. Paraśurāma became furious and pronounced his curse that since he had tricked him, he would remember his secret only till he had engaged with warriors lower than his capacity and till his moment of death has not arrived. If he faced a warrior superior to him or when the fatal moment arrived, he would forget it. But he also gave him a boon that he would be an unparalleled warrior among the kshatriyas of the earth. Therefore, he defeated several kings like Jarāsandha and kings at the *svayaṃvara* at *Kaliṅga*.

The Ādiparva [chapter four] tells us that the *asura* who had abducted Bhṛgu's wife was Puloman and not Daṃśa. Here no mention has been made about the curse of Bhṛgu. Rather, it is said that the abductor was reduced to ashes by her newly born child Chyavana, therefore Bhṛgu could not have cursed Puloman. Second, in the Karṇaparva the worm which bites Karṇa is not Daṃśa, but Indra in the disguise of an *asura*. The third important point is the insertion of another myth related to a curse by another [Agnihotrī] brahmana to Karṇa on the sea shore. It is said the Karṇa's chariot got stuck in the mud as a result of the curse of the Agnihotrī brahmana.[80] It is significant to note that in the Śāntiparva version of Paraśurāma myth, the story of Āpava Vasiṣṭha is grafted within its narrative which takes credit out of Paraśurāma for destruction of Kārtavīrya. It appears to have been a norm rather than an exception, where some group of redactors consciously tried to minimize the importance of Paraśurāma in his own mythical narratives. Moreover, the Śāntiparva version of this myth was prepared by someone who was neither sympathetic to nor aware of the Bhṛgu tradition. In fact, Indra's role as the insect is more in harmony with the general narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, as Indra had made several attempts to weaken Karṇa and strengthen Arjuna. Therefore, the Śāntiparva version of this myth appears to be of a somewhat later date than the Karṇaparva.

It seems that this myth of Paraśurāma's curse to Karṇa was composed after the final development of the story about Karṇa's fate. Perhaps it was an effort to make his character immensely tragic, for whom nothing brought success, not even the *brahamāstra*. It has been argued by V.S. Sukthankar that the Bhṛgus constructed the myth of Paraśurāma's being the greatest military teacher and inserted it into the *Mahābhārata* in order to hegemonies this epic. But that does not seem convincing. After all, why was Paraśurāma made the teacher of a defeated warrior? Indeed, all his three *śiṣyas* are tragically killed in the battle against the Pāṇḍavas. Why was Arjuna not shown to have received some advanced military training from Paraśurāma? It should be underlined that all three of his *śiṣyas* are non-kshatriya. The

constructions of these myths were the result of an effort by the mythmakers to present appropriate characters in the respective episodes according to their stereo-typed images. For example, Indra, the spoiler of penance, Durvāsā the angry *ṛṣis*, Nārada the messenger, Kṛṣṇa the diplomat, etc. may be found at various crossroads of the epic and Puranic narratives. If a redactor looks for a brahmana who is well versed in the arms that could fulfil the role of a teacher for non-kshatriya warriors, who is more suitable than Paraśurāma in the epic? Paraśurāma is not a historical individual; he is a character, a stereo-type who is presented at appropriate locations according to the narrative.

Similarly Paraśurāma has been presented as a role model for the warriors and, therefore, many of the warriors are compared with him at different places in the *Mahābhārata*, e.g. Aśvatthāmā,[81] Ekalavya,[82] Janamajeya,[83] Akṛti,[84] Arjuna.[85] But here it should be added that these comparisons are not exclusive; rather, sometimes a person is compared with Kārtavīrya Sahasrārjuna and Paraśurāma in the same breath. These are perhaps flourishes of some literary symbolisms and should not be taken very literally. Apart from these depictions of Paraśurāma as a warrior, he is also portrayed as a peace-maker and a spiritual instructor[86] or sometimes just as part of the congregation of *ṛṣis*.[87] As a peace-maker he narrated the famous story of Dambhodbhava and Nara-Nārāyaṇa.[88] He also figures in this role on a few other occasions.[89]

6. The Bhṛgus and the *Mahābhārata* [90]

We have just done a study of several major versions of the Paraśurāma myth referred in the *Mahābhārata* along with the narratives of the kshatriya annihilation, *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya*, Chyavana-Kuśika Saṃvāda, Paraśurāma-Bhīṣma war, cursing of Karṇa, etc. It does not give us a picture that all these myths were composed and propagated exclusively by the Bhṛgus to promote their clan identity and interest. However, almost seven decades ago V.S. Sukthankar, the great epic scholar, while analysing the relationship between the Bhṛgus and the *Mahābhārata*, asserted that the prime position given to the Bhṛgus and Paraśurāma in this epic proves

that the Bhṛgus were the redactors of this text. He proposed the theory of 'Bhṛguisation' of the *Mahābhārata*[91] and held that this brahmanic clan weaved its own myths and narratives with the story of a kshatriya clan to make itself more important. His theory has still a profound impact on the modern scholarship and demonstrates important bearing on the question of the composition of this epic. Could this epic be composed by a close group of people or is it a social creation? In order to understand its composition process let us examine some other aspects of this theory and ascertain the nature of relationship between Bhṛgus and the *Mahābhārata.*

The first contention of Sukthankar was that the number and frequency of the Bhṛgu references and Bhargava myths in the *Mahābhārata* are the highest compared to other brahmanic clans. However, according to one computation it was found that nearly 275 different names of the brahamanas occurred 8,500 times on the whole in the *Mahābhārata.* We find the following number of references to the eight most important individual sages or members of their families represented by them : [i] Marichi 175 [ii] Atri 60 [iii] Aṅgirasas 3200 [iv] Pulastya 35 [v] Pulaha 20 [vi] Kratu 20 [vii] Vasiṣṭha 830 and [viii] Bhṛgu 500.[92] Therefore, it is clear that the Aṅgirasas are the most prominent brahmanic clan in the *Mahābhārata,* followed by the Vasiṣṭhas and their echoes can be heard higher than the Bhṛgus. The Bhṛgus are certainly one of the three most important groups but statistically they are not the highest referred group. The fundamental weakness of this theory therefore emanates from the lack of sufficient discussion on the status of other brahmanic clans and their position in the epic.

In the background of this debate, it is important to verify the position and mythical postures of other brahmanic clans in the *Mahābhārata.* This area indeed needs deeper investigation; however, few instances may be cited to propose that the position of other clans in the epic was not as feeble as believed. Three Aṅgiran figures, namely Droṇa, Kṛpa and Aśvatthāma are more influential characters than any of the Bhārgava figures in this text. The importance of the Vasiṣṭhas in the *Mahābhārata* needs to be specifically underlined here. One of the foremost Vasiṣṭhas in the

epic is Vyāsa, who is not only projected as the author of the epic but in a sense progenitor of the Kuru dynasty as he performed the *niyoga* with the wives of Vichitravīrya. Apart from that, there are several other myths such as the Śri Kṛṣṇa version of the Paraśurāma myth and the curse of Āpava Vasiṣṭha to Karṇa which shows importance of this clans in the retellings of the epic. Similarly, significance of Kāśyapas in the text needs to be probed further. In the Ādiparva one finds Kaśyapa, son of Marīchi, being described as the progenitor of the gods and the titans and it also provides a full list of such gods and demigods.[93] It seems several of the Vasiṣṭhas, Kāśyapas, Aṅgirasas, and Bhāradvājas, played more important role than visualised by the propounder of this theory. It is true that several old Vedic clans like Viśvāmitras, Atris and Gotamas were becoming less important in this epic, which might have been due to various social changes such as merger with other clans or due to their distance from the *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition.

Sukthankar also argued, "The Bhārgavas spring into prominence all of a sudden in the *Mahābhārata*. We look in vain for any reflection of their phenomenal power and glory in the Vedic literature."[94] We have seen earlier in our discussion on the construction of the genealogy that Bhṛgu and Jamadagni are mentioned in singular as well as plural, denoting an individual as well as a group in the *Ṛgveda*. Various branches of the Bhṛgus such as Jāmdagnyas, Aurvas, Aitaśāyanas, Gṛtasamadas are also prominently visible in the Vedic literature. In the later Vedic period, the families of the Aṅgirasas, the Atharvans and the Bhṛgus came very close to form a powerful group to be known as Atharvāṅgirasas or Bhṛgvāṅgirasas. This composite group of brahamanic clans played an important role in the composition of the *Atharvaveda* and later in the development of *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition.[95] The Vedic texts mention that if someone has no particular gotramantra, he should recite Bhṛgu mantra and by the time we come to the composition of Sutra literature, Jāmdagnyas had become the largest *gotra* and come first in the *pravara* list.[96] So, while talking about the Bhṛgus, we are not looking at a small clan, rather a large conglomerate of brahmanic clans. Several

communities who later merged to form this large clan are known from the Vedic period and hence it would not be correct to say that Bhārgavas sprang into prominence suddenly in the *Mahābhārata.*

Sukthankar stressed the point that the Bhārgava figures are entirely foreign to the original saga of the Bhāratas.[97] This may be correct, but then why to single out only the Bhṛgus for that purpose. The entire didactic material and hundreds of other myths related to the priests and kings of other clans, nāgas, asuras and other deities should be purged out of the epic to reconstitute the *ur* text of 24000 *ślokas.* However, if we take a broad view of the epic, then like narratives of other mythical beings, narratives of the Bhṛgus may not be labelled foreign. The *Mahābhārata* is a saga of such a clan of kshatriyas who had a very close relationship with brahmana clans, which might have led to better preservation of their tradition than other dynasties. It has been pointed out that King Bharata adopted the Aṅgirasas ṛṣi Bhāradvāja as his son, and Bhāradvāja begot Vitatha who continued the Paurava dynasty and consequently the Bhāratas could assert either kshatriya paternity or brahmana paternity or both combined.[98] The brahmakṣatra character of *Mahābhārata* is so pervasive that it may explain the reason for the presence of so many Bhṛgavangirās characters, like Paraśurāma, Droṇa, Dadhīchi, Kṛpāchārya, and Aśvatthāmā in the epic.

It cannot be denied that the epic shows the evidence of weaving and appropriation of the narratives, but this tendency is not restricted to one clan, community or sect. We find evidence of Śivaite efforts to corner a place of importance in the later portions of the *Mahābhārata* as discussed in the next chapter. The appropriation of myths are quite common and found not only in the *Mahābhārata* but even in the Purāṇas. However, it is not done by erasing the myth of other communities or cults, but by adding one's own myth to it. Such appropriation of Paraśurāma myths have been performed by the Vasiṣṭhas and the Kāśyapas, as pointed out earlier. It would be a fascinating subject to study the appropriation and weaving of various types of narratives in the

Mahābhārata to prepare an exhaustive index of overlaps. However, the most important evidence of 'tendentious Bhṛguisation' cited by Sukthankar in the case of *Śodaṣarājakiya* myth does not stand the scrutiny. Second, even these weavings have a pattern and should not be seen as effort to "smuggle in some stories".[99] Most of the didactic, cultic, *tīrtha* or caste related myths appear in a pertinent place with a particular logic. While Āraṇyakaparva is full of brahmanic clan and *tīrtha* myths Virāṭaparva has no such narrative in it. As a result, Virāṭaparava is small and compact section. Why did those redactors not load Virāṭaparva with myths? Perhaps it does not offer that kind of "temporal hiatus"[100] which we find in the case of Āraṇyaka. Similarly, most *nīti*, *dāna* and *varṇāśrama* narratives appear in the Śāntiparva or in the later portion of the *Mahābhārata*, where there was scope for teaching after such a great devastation. On the whole weavings and appropriations are no sign of either takeover or possession of a text exclusively by a family for very long time. As argued earlier, it is difficult to visualise that during eight hundred to one thousand years of its composition *Mahābhārata* remained property of a particular clan of brahmanas. If Bhārgavas controlled the text during the formative period then they could have projected sage Bhṛgu instead of Vyāsa, as the one who performed the *niyoga* with the wives of Vichitravīrya. In that case, the entire Bhārata saga could have been appropriated by the Bhārgava clan.

As far as the question of the arrogant and domineering image of the Bhṛgu mythical figures is concerned, it is really intriguing, but one should not attempt any simplistic explanation. One should try to understand the complexities of myth-making processes rather than alleging exclusive control over the composition of the epic by a single clan of Bhṛgus. Wherever the Bhṛgu myths appear, they show this tendency. Bloomfield had long back observed such tendencies of the Bhṛgus even in the *Atharvaveda* and noted that out of the two families of the Aṅgiras and the Bhṛgus, the latter possessed an unbelievable tendency to magnify their own importance. So its explanation had to be sought in the very nature of the Bhṛgu tradition rather than Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata*,

because wherever they occur, be it Vedic or Purāṇic, they have the same tone and tenor.

In this whole debate, the depiction of Paraśurāma in the *Mahābhārata* is made central to the theory of Bhṛguisation. According to Sukthankar, Paraśurāma was made a 'perfect warrior' in this text; he was not only the guru of all eminent warriors but was very much on the way to attaining avatārahood, which shows that Bhṛguaids were the redactors of the text also. We will take various aspects related to the avatārahood of Paraśurāma in the following chapter. But here, if we observe carefully, we will find that there are several anti-Bhṛgu or at least anti-Paraśurāma myths coexisting inside the *Mahābhārata*. For example, all the major achievements and deeds of Paraśurāma are either ridiculed or questioned. First of all, his image of indefeatable warrior is questioned when Bhīṣma almost defeats him in the Ambopākhyāna. The humiliation suffered at the hand of Dāśarathī Rāma, although not part of the accepted text, is in the vulgate version sage Lomaṣa narrates this story. Similarly, in the Southern recension [except grantha 4] in the Sabhāparva [after Chapter 35.29], inside a long passage of 1,612 lines related to Kṛṣṇa, Paraśurāma's unsuccessful war against Śālva is described and a forecast is made that only Kṛṣṇa will kill Śālva. Therefore, in a way Paraśurāma is made an entity who loses most of his battles.

Similarly, his claim about extermination of kshatriyas has been ridiculed by Parāvasu who was the grandson of Viśvāmitra and son of Raibhya in the king's court; and the story of Chirkari Gautam of the Angiran clan, who refuses to follow his father's command to kill his mother, show this dimension of the epic. We have a more favourable image of Kārtavīrya Arjuna in the Śri Kṛṣṇa version of the Paraśurāma story in the Āraṇyakaparva. Therefore, the argument of giving a more favourable image to the Bhṛgus is not true in all the cases, as held by Sukthankar. It seems Sukthankar treats the Paraśurāma myth as a historical event and a growth-less moribund story. He does not carry a dynamic concept of myth making, where myths evolve over a long period of time.

Now the question is: who were the redactors of the *Mahābhārata?* It seems that the *Mahābhāraṛta* might have been shaped in the hands of the Vasiṣṭhas, Bhāradvājas, Bhṛgus and Aṅgirasas at the same time. The model of exclusive possession of a vast epic like *Mahābhārata* in the hand of a clan does not seem tenable. Epic of this magnitude cannot be composed in a closed environment by a few people. This understanding of the composition of myth should give way to a more complex understanding of the process in which entire society constituting the patron, the clientele and the articulator of myths and narratives influence the contours of the epic. The popularity of the epic is precisely due to its being live to the responses of the people and shows remarkable ability to handle the back and forth movement of myths between the folk and classical domain, as pointed out by Wendy Doniger.[101]

It seems that the *Mahābhārata* has at least three thematic stages of development. First, where a ballad became the core of the epic; second, when thousands of mythologies entered this text; and third, when their entire text is remodelled for a new society based on the *varṇāśrama* dharma where various kinds of descriptions about *dāna, dharma, tīrtha*, etc. gained an upper hand in the narrative. In this phase, *kula* and *gotra* identity had given way to the *varṇa* identity of the brahmanas. The era of clan identity and rivalry has ended in the Vedic period and in the post-Vedic times it gave way to class, *varṇa*, caste and cultic identities. Myths of different brahmanic families became the common property of all brahmanas, and with the rise of the cult-related identities, now the brahmanas of all *gotras* were perhaps consolidating under new banners. Therefore, considering these points, we may conclude that the *Mahābhāraṛta* was not the property of one clan but entire brahmanic traditions during its expansion, and attributing it mainly to the Bhṛgus will amount to apportioning them more importance than the *Mahābhārata* actually assigns to them.

Moreover, the authors of the *Mahābhārata* should be identified in the historical context, let us not get lost in the hoary past of pre-Vedic or early Vedic times. The story of the *Mahābhārata* reflects

an agrarian society and nascent state which could have originated around 800 BCE. Later, this oral tradition was systematised and redacted between 400 BCE and 400 CE. That means that the redaction of *Mahābhārata* was done during the rule of the Nandas, the Mauryas, the Kushanas, and the Guptas. The brahmana redactors of the *Mahābhārata* might have been a part of the royal court and they should not be seen as wild tribes of Atharvaṇa priests of the Vedic times. The material milieu of the composition of the *Mahābhārata* should be de-romanticised. Similarly, the propagators of the Paraśurāma myths may have been migrant brahmana settlers on the western coast and Himalayas. These brahmanas must have been associated with all *gotras* and not strictly related to the Bhṛgu origin alone. The unique socio-economic need of these settlers may have promoted the cult and myth of Paraśurāma in this area, which is why most of the Paraśurāma temples are found on the western coast and in the Himalayas. Therefore, the redactors of the *Mahābhārata* and propagators of the Paraśurāma myths should be located in the historical and not mythical time and space.

Footnotes

1 'Autonomy' comes here as a functional concept and underlines that some of the components of Paraśurāma myth might have been separately used to fulfill a particular purpose, somewhat independent of the total edifice of his myth. It is not being presented in the context of the ongoing so-called base-superstructure debate, to ascribe the primacy of mind over matter, or vice versa, in a particular situation.

2 V.S. Sukthankar, Epic Studies VI; D.D. Kosambi, "The Emergence of National Characteristics among Three Indo–European People", *ABORI*, 20, 1938–39, pp. 192–206; idem, "The Study of Ancient Indian Tradition", *Indica*, 1953, p. 212.

3 *Mahābhārata*, C.E.1.2.4; G.P. 1.2.1–11, pp. 23–24.

4 *Mahābhārata*, G.P.1. 64. 4–6 pp. 180.

5 *Mahābhārata*. CE 2. 13. 2; G.P. 2. 4. 2 pp. 706–7.

6 *Mahābhārata*, G.P. pp. 792.

7 V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit, pp. 39–42.

8 The notion of the shorter version being earlier than the larger version of a text has been successfully questioned in several cases. However, it seems

that such questions should be decided on the basis of the nature of the text itself. Since the general direction in the *Mahābhārata* is the expansion and not purging of the text, therefore, the shorter version of *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya* may be suggested to be earlier than the larger version.

9 It should also be noted that no region of south India is mentioned in this list of conquered territories.

10 Kumari S.S. Janaki "Paraśurāma", Purāṇa, 1966, Part I, pp. 52-82. p.66.

11 *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 13. 137 . 137–138, G.P. 13. 152–153, pp. 6057–59.

12 *Mahābhārata*, B.1. 58. 4, 1. 98. 3, 12. 48. 10, 13. 14. 273, 13 .84. 31.

13 *Mahābhārata*, B. 3. 117 . 9, 7. 70. 20, 12. 48. 9, 12. 49. 64.

14 V.S.Sukthankar, op.cit., p. 65.

15 *Agni Purāṇa*, 4. 40–20, *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*, XLVI. 43; *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Nagarakhanda*, Ch. 68, 1–8.

16 *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX . 16. 19–20.

17 *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 242.70–74.

18 *Brahma* Purāṇa, 104. 110.

19 Adelbert Gail, *Paraśurāma Brahmane und Krieger*, p. 222.

20 *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 241. 56–57.

21 *Brahma Purāṇa*, 104. 111.

22 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 47. 6–23.

23 *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 241. 76–77.

24 Irawati Karve, "The Paraśurāma Myth", *JUB* 1,1932–33, pp. 115–139.

25 *Mahābhārata*, G.P. 3. 83. 41. P. 1183, 3. 85. 2[C.E. 2. 83. 2] p. 1202, 3. 85. 43 p. 1205 [C.E. 3. 83. 40] and *Padma Purāṇa III.* 26. 39 more information on this will be found in chapter five.

26 *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX.16. 20–22.

27 *Padma Purāṇa* VI.241.78.

28 *Brahma Purāṇa*, 104 . 112–116.

29 *Narasiṃha Purāṇa* XLVI. 41–43.

30 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 47–61.

31 Ibid. 2.3. 57–58.

32 *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, VIII. 21.

33 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, XIII. 7. 1. 15.

34 J.Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts*, I. P.; M. Biardeau, "The Story of Arjuna Kārtavīrya without Reconstruction", *Purāṇa*, Vol. 12, 1970 pp. 293–94.

35 Ibid.

36 *Mahābhārata*, B.12. 49. 74.

[37] Ibid.C.E. 13. 83–86, G.P. 13. 84–86, pp. 5726–42.

[38] Ibid.C.E. 13 .61. 31; G.P. 13. 62 . 34 pp. 5666.

[39] *Mahābhārata* C.E.3. 115; 12. G.P. 3.115. 19–45, pp. 1275–1277, 12. 49. 7–30 pp.4543–4449 Sukthankar, *Epic Studies* VI. p.22.

[40] Laurie L. Pattan, "The Transparent Text : The Puranic Trend in the *Bṛhaddevatā*", In Wendy Doniger, ed. *Purāṇa Perennis*, p.15.

[41] *Brahma Purāṇa*, I. 8. 29–54.

[42] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 29. 63–89.

[43] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 29 . 83.

[44] *Brahma Purāṇa*, 8. 49–54.

[45] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I.33.

[46] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX.15. 5–15.

[47] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 13. 51–56; G.P. 13. 51–56, pp. 5637–70.

[48] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 13. 54. 31 G.P. 13. 56. 14–21 p. 5650.

[49] *Mahābhārata*, B.13 55. 31.

[50] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I.34.

[51] Adalbert Gail, op.cit., p.223.

[52] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I.36.1–15.

[53] *Padma Purāṇa* pp. 2, 317–18.

[54] *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I.36.10–28.

[55] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 3. 204 .12 G.P. 3. 214 .13 p.1571.

[56] *Padma Purāṇa*, V. 58 . 42–44 .p. 1886.

[57] S.A. Dange, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myth*, pp. 382–416 .

[58] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 3.121–122; G.P. 3. 121–122; Bhāgavata Purāṇa 9.3. 2–26.

[59] V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit. p.37.

[60] *Mahābhārata*, G.P. 5. 178 . 62 p. 2508.

[61] Ibid. G.P. 5. 185 . 10 p. 2521.

[62] Adalbert Gail, op.cit., pp. 35–39 quoted in Lynn Thomas, "Paraśurāma and Time" in Julia Leslie, ed. *Myth and Mythmaking*, p. 78.

[63] *Mahābhārata*, C.E . 5. 145. 23; G.P . 5. 147 . 24; p. 2432.

[64] Ibid, C.E. 5. 149. 26, G.P. 5. 151. 26, p. 2441.

[65] Ibid, C.E. 5.149. 30, G.P. 5. 151. 30, p. 2441.

[66] Ibid, C.E. 6. 104 . 43, G.P. 6. 108. 45 p. 3048.

[67] Ibid, C.E. 5. 166 . 4, G.P. 6. 168. 33.

[68] Ibid, C. E . 12. 38 13, 12. 46 . 17; G.P 12. 37 . 13, 12. 46 . 17 p. 4517.

[69] Ibid C .E. 6. 14. 7, 6. 15.19–20, 6. 15 . 43–46, 12 . 27. 8, 12. 46. 14, 13. 154. 21 G.P. 6. 13 . 7, 6. 14 . 21, pp. 2575, 6. 14 . 47–49 pp. 2577, 12.27. 8 pp. 4481, 12. 46. 14 pp. 4531, 13. 168 . 24–28 pp.6097.

[70] Ibid, C. E. 1. 121. 15–23, G.P. 1. 129. 51–66 pp. 387–91.

[71] Ibid, C.E. 1 .154. G.P. 1. 165 . 8–13, p.486.

[72] *Mahābhārata*, C. E. 7. 166. 4; G. P. 7 . 194 . 4 p. 3707.

[73] Ibid, C. E. 8. 1. 37; G. P. 8 . 2 . 13 p. 3759.

[74] *Mahābhārata* C.E. 3. 286. 78, 4. 43. 16, 5. 54 . 51–52, 5. 61. 1–4, 5. 61. 17, 7 .1. 43, 7. 39. 27, 8. 5. 66–67, 8 . 27. 98, 8. 46. 6, 8. 46 . 25 G.P. 3. 302 .8–9, pp. 1802, 4.48 .18 p. 1973, 5. 55 . 54–55 p. 2226, 5. 62 . 1–6, p. 2242,5. 62 .17 p. 2244, 1. 46, p. 3104,7. 40. 30 p. 3218, 8. 9. 45 p. 3776, 8. 40 . 50 p. 3880, 8. 66. 4. P. 3976, 8. 66. 24 p. 3977.

[75] Ibid, C.E. 5.48 . 27–28, 5. 61. 1–4 G.P. 5. 49 . 27–28; 5. 62. 1 .p. 2242.

[76] Ibid, C.E. 8. 22. 37–38 G.P. 8. 31. 44–47 p. 3842.

[77] Ibid, C.E. 8. 26 . 56, G.P. 8. 37 . 27 p. 3871.

[78] Ibid, C.E. 8. 51 . 101–102, G.P. 8. 73. 116, p. 4008, Southern Recension in G.P. p. 4029, C. E. expunged fn, K4 T2.

[79] Ibid, G. P . 8. 42 3–9 pp. 3887–88.

[80] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 12. 5. 11 G.P. 12. 5. 11 p. 4434, Repeated at C.E. 8. 66. 42; G.P. 8. 90. 82 p.4086 expunged from C.E. but in fn, 1123, Vol. 10, p. 586, V1, B, Dn, Da, D1.3 -7, G.P 8. 90. 84 p. 4087.

[81] *Mahābhārata* Ibid, C. E. 7. 166. 8. G.P. 7. 194. 8 p. 3708.

[82] Ibid, C.E. 7 . 156. 18 G. P. 7. 181. 18 p. 3658.

[83] Ibid,G.P. 1. 55. 16 p. 155.

[84] Ibid, C. E. 2. 13. 22, G. P. 2. 14. 22 p. 707.

[85] Ibid, C. E. 1. 181. 16– 28, G. P. 1. 189. 17– 28 pp. 547–548.

[86] Ibid, C. E. 2. 69. 13; G. P. 2. 79. 15 p. 930.

[87] Ibid, C. E. 2. 49. 11, 2. 69 . 13 5. 60 . 4 G.P. 2. 53. 11, p. 867, 2. 78. 15 p. 930 3. 12. 51. p 983, 5. 61. 4. p.2240.

[88] Ibid, C.E. 5 . 94.170–197, G.P. 5. 96 . 3–52 pp 2323–27.

[89] Ibid, C. E. 6. 116. 34 G.P. 6. 121. 36 p. 3096, G.P. 6. 23. 27 p. 2596, 6. 49. 11, p. 2844.

[90] cf. Chapter one for summary of Sukthankar's arguments.

[91] V.S. Sukthankar, *Epic Studies* VI, 'The Bhrgus and The Bharatas: A Text Historical Study', *ABORI*, XVIII, Oct.1936, pp.1–76.

[92] N.J. Shende, The Authorship of the *Mahābhārata*, *ABORI*, 24, 1943, pp. 67–82.

[93] *Mahābhārata*, 1.60.40.

[94] V.S.Sukthankar, op.cit. p.66.

[95] V.S.Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India*, p.12.

[96] V.G. Rahurkar, "The Origin of the Gotra System in the *Ṛgveda*", *ABORI*, 53, 1972, pp.93–97.

[97] V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit.70.

[98] F.E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, p.247.

[99] V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit. p.14.

[100] Pisani, "Rise of the *Mahābhārata*", quoted in K.Kunjuni Raja, "Architectonics of the *Mahābhārata* and the place of Legends in its Structure", in R.N.Dandekar, ed. *The Mahābhārata Revisited*, p. 87–93.

[101] Quoted in T.S. Rukmini, "Folk Traditions Related to the *Mahābhārata* in South India", in K.S.Singh, ed. *The Mahābhārata in the Tribal and Folk Traditions of India*, p.195.

Chapter 4

Survival in the Divine Kingdom

1. Paraśurāma and Other Deities

It has been argued in the previous chapter that different social groups and segments were trying to utilise the Paraśurāma myth and its various components, in order to pursue their own social agendas. This myth was also employed to strengthen the position of other cult figures and their sects. It must be underlined at the outset that the tendency of other cults and mythical beings to dominate Paraśurāma was not limited to his cult alone; rather, it was a common idiom of interaction prevalent amongst different cultic figures. When domination of bigger powers over smaller entities was a norm rather than exception in society, mythical and cultic space followed suit. In the kingdom of gods, too, there was no equality or egalitarianism and the language of domination and superiority was omnipresent. Instances of this tendency are very common in the epics and Purāṇas. While one god is praised in one paragraph, some other deity is eulogised in the next. It aims to undermine the importance of the first and tries to enhance the position of the second. The state of tussle is seen not only among supreme deities such as Śiva, Viṣṇu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, but also between supra-regional gods on the one hand and smaller intra-regional cultic entities on the other.

As far as Paraśurāma is concerned, there are two different strategies of domination reflected in the epics and the Purāṇas.

Some deities undertake a hostile or unfriendly route to domination, which hurts the image of Paraśurāma and other deities' image improves at his cost. The portrayal of Paraśurāma's interactions with Śiva, Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa, and Rāma Dāśarathī fall under this category. While in another instance some deities coax adoration and endorsement of their greatness from Paraśurāma, they in turn do not denigrate his position but pay respect and leave a space for his survival too. Examples of such narratives are descriptions of Paraśurāma's relationship with Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, Subrahmaṇya and Kalki.

Paraśurāma and Śiva

The Śivaite endeavour to hegemonise the myths and cult of Paraśurāma had also two main modus operandi. The first was to claim that the victory of Paraśurāma over Kārtavīrya became possible due to weapons and boons granted to him by Lord Śiva and the second through assertions that several *tīrthas*, temples or shrines of Śiva were established by Paraśurāma. Both these attempts were aimed at projecting Paraśurāma as a devotee or *bhakta* of Śiva. Moreover, these depictions represented a strife between Viṣṇuism and Śivaism at that time for securing dominance over the divine kingdom. Under these circumstances, Śaivites took great pleasure in proclaiming that Paraśurāma, an avatāra of Viṣṇu, was actually a devotee, dependent and subservient of Śiva. Even Dāśarathī Rāma, another avatāra of Viṣṇu, was made to worship Śiva at Rāmeśvaram before starting on his journey to Laṅkā.

The study of the *Mahābhārata* reveals a similar exercise in the text-domination on the part of the Śaivite redactors. The *Mahābhārata* which is largely a Vaiṣṇava text, has various sections where Śiva is eulogised and some kind of credit is attributed to him for the task actually performed by the heroes of the *Mahābhārata.* For example, when Aśvatthāmā destroyed the Pāṇḍava camp at night, Śiva is said to be standing there and helping him in this task of destruction. Similarly, the *Mahābhārata* does not only illustrate Vaiṣṇava linkages of Paraśurāma, but also elaborates on his relation to Śiva. In the Karṇaparva[1] of the

Mahābhārata, one of the narratives highlights the association of Paraśurāma with Śiva. This myth is situated in a clear-cut Śaiva section of the text, where other myths depicting the greatness of Śiva have also been included. For example, it describes how Brahmā prayed to Śiva to kill the demon called Tripura and provides a description of Śiva's great chariot, among other details. This myth perhaps has two major functions. First, to present the grandeur of Śiva and second to assert the prowess of Karṇa. Since the latter has already been discussed in the second chapter, it would be interesting to study the narratives related to the former.

The Śiva-Tripura myth mentioned above states that in order to acquire various arms and weapons, Paraśurāma performed a long penance and pleased Śiva. One day, Śiva himself appeared before Paraśurāma and said he knew what Rāma wanted and asked him to purify his heart and that in due course of time, he would acquire his desired weapons. Paraśurāma bowed before Śaṅkara and said: "O God of gods, you give the weapons I desire whenever you find that I have become suitable for that". After that Paraśurāma again performed severe penance, sacrifice, *dāna* and *homa*, etc. for a long time and worshipped Śiva. Śiva was pleased with Paraśurāma and he told Pārvatī that Paraśurāma has become his great devotee and a man of great vows. Śiva repeated these praises in front of other gods and *pitṛ* (ancestors) as well.

In those days the demons had become very powerful. Śiva called Paraśurāma and asked him to kill all the enemies of the gods. Paraśurāma begged him: "I am not an expert in weapons, what power do I have to kill these veterans of warfare?" Śiva replied: "You go on my order, you will certainly be able to annihilate the enemies of the gods." Paraśurāma went and killed all the demons. The great lord bestowed upon him many boons and said to him, *"Now you have become a god"*. Paraśurāma bowed before Śiva and after acquiring various kinds of divine weapons, went back with his permission.

Here it should be noted that no particular weapon, like an axe or bow, is mentioned in this narrative, as being given by Śiva to Paraśurāma. Neither are his achievements, like killing of Kārtavīrya

or kshatriyas mentioned. Paraśurāma is completely devoid of any stature before the all-powerful Śiva. Even his achievement regarding the defeat of demons is largely attributed to the power of Śiva. Paraśurāma is just an agent, a mere medium. This task could be fulfilled by anyone whom Śiva may have desired. Here Paraśurāma is not even a warrior or expert of military science, he is just a devotee of Śiva, which is what made him powerful enough to defeat veteran warriors. Only at the end Śiva declares him to be a god, which also reflects that by the time this myth was conceived Paraśurāma had a status of a god at least in some parts of the Indian subcontinent. This myth seems to be a work of Śaiva priests who were engaged in broadening the social and cultic base of their sect.

A similar kind of myth occurs again in the Dānadharmaparva of Anuśāsanaparva[2], where Upamanyu eulogises and describes the majesty of Śiva. This is also located in a Śaiva section of the *Mahābhārata* and the concerned verses describe the world of Śiva *(Śivaloka)*. In the course of his narration, Upamanyu also explicates the weapons seen in *Śivaloka*, viz. Triśula, Pāśupatāstra and Paraśu, etc. While describing paraśu, Upamanyu says that "in early times Paraśurāma pleased Mahendra and acquired the sharp-edged axe (paraśu) with which he killed Kārtavīrya Arjuna and annihilated kshatriyas, I saw near lord Rudra. O Govinda! Paraśurāma with the help of same *paraśu* annihilated kshatriyas twenty-one times on earth. Its edges were shining; its head was looking ferocious. It was placed in front of the snake-laden neck of Mahādeva. Near *Śuladhārī* Śiva that axe was shining like hundreds of burning fires."

The *Śiva Purāṇa*[3] also recounts this narrative in which Upamanyu meets Kṛṣṇa and describes the *Śivaloka* to him. He says: "I saw his sharp-edged axe decorated with serpents. It was terrible as the god of death holding a noose in his hand. It was like an astonishing ray of the sun and had the features of the fire at the end of the *Kalpa*. It was the size of a fullgrown man. Bhārgava Rāma had used it in the battle for extermination of the kshatriyas. It was given to Rāma by Śiva formerly and strengthened by it the delighted sage burnt kshatriyas twenty-one times."

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[4] gives an elaborate description of Paraśurāma's relationship not only with Śiva, but with other members of the Śiva *Pañchāyata,* too. One of the early narratives in this Purāṇa begins with Paraśurāma's visit to his paternal grandancestors and famous sages such as Ṛchika, Aurva, Chyavana and Bhṛgu. At the end he was thus advised by the sage Bhṛgu: "Go to the great mountain Himavān ... and set up an auspicious hermitage, with due observance of holy rites, propitiate Mahādeva by means of penance ... when Śaṅkara ... is propitiated, dear son, request him for all sorts of weapons as you desire. This difficult task must be performed by you for the welfare of all *devas.*"

Having been advised thus, Rāma reached Himavān and started his penance. Śiva became extremely pleased at heart with Rāma. Desirous of knowing the depth of his devotion to him, Lord Śaṅkara disguised himself as a deer hunter and went to him and then a long dialogue took place between the disguised Śiva and Paraśurāma. Rāma asks the hunter [*kirāta*] to go away from that area as it would disturb him in his penance. But the hunter refuses to go away from the place and replies to all his arguments in a clever manner. There are two significant issues in this argument. One, Paraśurāma tries to denigrate the status of the hunter due to the violence involved in his profession and says that non-violence is the eternal virtue.[5] The hunter not only points out to him that "Śiva..[who]..is worthy of being worshipped by you ... by cutting off the head of Brahmā, ...incurred the sin of *brahamahatyā.*" [6]..... [moreover] "it is for the sustenance of my parents, sons and others that destruction of living being is carried out by me as a part of my duty. If I kill ...[more than].. what is sufficient to nourish my parents and others, then I may incur sin." [7]

Therefore, in a way a dialogue on the virtues of violence and non-violence is added and limited violence for the sake of one's own survival is endorsed. This should be seen in contrast to the position of Viṣṇuism and other sects like Buddhism and Jainism. This theme of violence *vs.* non-violence is repeated several times in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.* For instance, Jamadagni tried to convince Paraśurāma, after the assault of Kārtavīrya, that a *sādhu*

and brahmana should not retaliate.[8] But more important is the hunter's taunt: "By killing your own mother you have been repudiated and expelled by almost all people of the world. Under the pretext of performing a penance, you have confined your activities to the dense forest devoid of people. It is for dispelling the sins arising from brahmana slaughter, the murder of an elderly lady [your mother] that you are performing this penance, but it [sin] won't be destroyed on account of this penance ... understand that there is no expiation [from this sin] to those who injure or hurt their mother. If, O Rāma, the main characteristic feature of virtue is considered to be non-violence by you, then why did you cut off the head of your mother with your own hand? After committing the terrible murder of your mother, [a sin] despised by all the worlds, you profess to be a righteous man and censure others as you please."[9]

This narrative has a double edge. On the one hand, it ridicules the so-called virtue of non-violence and on the other, it belittles the Viṣṇuite image of Paraśurāma. It should be underlined here that the Śivaite discourse on Paraśurāma always ridicules him as a mother killer.[10] At the same time, on the basis of Rāma's violent image, an attempt is made to establish his close relationship with Śivaism. In fact, the hunter says in so many words, "I think O sage, that within a short while the fulfilment of penance has been achieved by you now on account of the identity of qualities between you and Rudra."[11]

One finds two different attitudes to hunting-gathering as a profession and people of marginal areas are made apparent here. The great strength of Śivaism lies in its capacity to accommodate and even glorify marginal communities and their mode of production. Therefore, it is not for nothing that the major focus of the Paraśurāma–Śiva relation is centred upon weapons or means of violence. Śiva's order to kill demons and gift weapons becomes the major theme of correspondence between them. The bestowal of weapons and power by Śiva to Paraśurāma figures in two places in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*. One, at the end of his dialogue with Śiva disguised as a hunter and another, when he visits *Śivaloka* at

the advice of Brahmā after Kārtavīrya perpetrated atrocities on the hermitage of Jamadagni. These two episodes are disconnected and seem to have been developed in two different periods. If Śiva had given weapons at the beginning itself,[12] there would have been no need to visit *Śivaloka* again to get the same weapons.

This narrative, which has a close similarity to the *Karṇaparva* of the *Mahābhārata*, describes how *asuras* became powerful and Śiva called upon Paraśurāma to perform the task of vanquishing them. Paraśurāma said, "I am ignorant of miraculous missiles, O Lord of the *devas*, I am not an expert in warfare. How can I kill all the enemies of the *devas* without any weapon?" [13] Then Śiva gave his axe to Rāma and said, "Due to my grace, O gentle one, may there be sufficient power in you, enabling you to kill all the enemies of *devas*, and be unassailable to all your enemies." Paraśurāma fulfilled his task and killed all the great *asuras* with his axe.[14] The bestowal of axe by Śiva to Paraśurāma may be an attempt to provide an explanation as to why Rāma Jāmadagneya was also called Paraśurāma, i.e. Rāma, the wielder of axe.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, which provides a sympathetic treatment to Paraśurāma acknowledges his devotion to Śiva also and recounts, "Thereupon, Rāma who was born of a part of splendour of Viṣṇu and who was equipped with devotion to Rudra, shone like the splendour of the Sun accompanied by brilliance".[15] This suggests that attempts to absorb Paraśurāma into the Śaiva cycle of legends came later than his declaration as an avatāra. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* describes that Paraśurāma went to meet Śiva twice and for the first time only one weapon is given to him for the specific task of killing of *dānavas*. The second time he went to seek permission to kill Kārtavīrya and other kings who were devotees of Śiva, he got all those weapons which had been heard to be possessed by Śiva.

One can see that the entire section of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* dealing with the myth of Paraśurāma reflects the tension between Viṣṇuism and Śivaism. When Paraśurāma decides to fight Kārtavīrya, he first goes to Brahmā who advises him to go to Śiva and gives this reason: "On the earth there are many kings who are

the followers of Śaṅkara. Without the permission of the great god, who is powerful enough to kill them as they wear the *kavacha* [coat of mail] and have *śaktis* [divine javelins] inaccessible to others ... O dear boy, take from your preceptor Hara, a *kavacha* having the *mantra* of Śri Kṛṣṇa. The splendour of Viṣṇu is difficult to be transgressed but Śiva's power will conquer it."[16] When Paraśurāma reached *Śivaloka*, he bowed down to Śiva and recited a long eulogy in his praise, Śiva asked him "O boy, who are you? In whose family were you born? What is the purpose for which you have come here?... I shall grant you whatever you have in your mind."[17] The all-knowing god is either given a very weak memory by the redactors or perhaps it was an essential part of their narrative style to begin the dialogue with these introductory questions.

Paraśurāma introduces himself and narrates how he has vowed to exterminate kshatriyas twenty-one times. Paraśurāma begs for help. Śiva is pleased and says to Rāma, "... From today onward, O brahmana, you shall be like Skanda to me ... I will give you the divine coat of mail and teach you the *mantra* thereof. Due to its favour, you will sportingly kill Kārtavīrya and make the earth devoid of kings, twenty-one times." After saying this, Śaṅkara teaches him the *mantra* [esoteric formula], which was otherwise extremely difficult to obtain and gives him weapons, like the extremely miraculous coat of mail named *trailokyavijaya*, *nāgapāśa, pāśupata, brahmāstra* which was inaccessible, *nārayaṇāstra, āgneya, vāyavya, varuṇāstra, gandharvāstra, garuḍāstra,* the extremely wonderful weapon *jṛmbhanāstra, śakti, paraśu, daṇḍa, triśūla and gadā.*

On receiving these weapons, Rāma is delighted. After bowing to the quiescent Śiva, Durgā, Skanda and Gaṇeśwara and circumambulating them, Rāma goes to the excellent holy centre Puṣkara. He mastered the technique of the *mantra* and *kavacha* conferred by Śiva and fulfills his task. After killing Kārtavīrya along with his army and entire family he returns. The leading member of the family of Bhrgu goes to the abode of his father.[18]

There are two very important points in this narrative. First, there is over-emphasis on the efficacy of the *mantra*. The weapons

are just mentioned there but the real thing is the *mantra* which gives the victory. Moreover, the *Paraśu* is just one among many weapons and there is no stress on the bestowal of the *Paraśu,* as has been seen in the case of some of the narratives, especially in the *Mahābhārata.* This emphasis on the *kavacha* and *mantra* is a typical feature of medieval tantricism, which perhaps dominated every sect of religious beliefs in India in that period. Second, this narrative ends without portraying any war with Kārtavīrya. It simply states that with the help of these divine *mantras* and weapons, Paraśurāma killed Kārtavīrya and the entire kshatriya race. Therefore, the focus is on Śiva's act of bestowal of weapons and not on the greatness of Paraśurāma in fulfilling this task. Interestingly, the tension between Śivaism and Viṣṇuism becomes very apparent here and also illustrates the modus operandi of different sects to utilise various texts for their own benefit.

At the end of this narrative begins a chapter which explains the secret of the *kavacha,* which Śiva gave to Paraśurāma, with which one could conquer the three worlds. The *mantra* turns out to be *gopījana-Vallabhāya svāha* and Kṛṣṇa is revealed the deity of this mantra. After this, a large section is devoted to the explanation of the grandeur of Kṛṣṇa. Chapters 33 to 37 narrate how an antelope was explaining to his beloved the power of the Kṛṣṇa hymn which only Agastya knew. Paraśurāma went to Agastya's ashram and learnt this *mantra* and gained victory over Kārtavīrya. Here the fight between Arjuna and Rāma is portrayed in detail. So a pattern emerges that whenever a Viṣṇuite narrative is given, there is an emphasis on the Kārtavīrya-slaying myth. Second, it should be noted that this Kṛṣṇite section does not deny or mutilate the Śivaite myth but in the battle for supremacy another myth was grafted to show the higher position of Kṛṣṇa. This interweaving of myths of different sects was instrumental in the expansion of the Purāṇas as a text and its wider acceptance among diverse communities.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*[19] has an almost similar narrative, which describes two encounters with Śiva, the first before the annihilation of Kārtavīrya and the second after the accomplishment

of the mission. The difference lies in the sentiment expressed for Paraśurāma. The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* is much less respectful to Paraśurāma, which depicts that he weeps and tries to commit sucide in Śiva's court, only then is he given the desired *mantra, kavacha* and weapons. It spends much more space on depictions of *Śivaloka* and other *lokas* as well as on descriptions of various types of magical amulets, incantations, good and bad dreams and omens. In this Purāṇa, despite a long section devoted to the battle with Kārtavīrya and his army, Paraśurāma is never portrayed as dexterous warrior; rather, he is shown completely dependent on the favour extended by Śiva and other deities.

Similarly, in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* Jamadagni asks Paraśurāma to please Śiva. When Paraśurāma reaches, Indra has just left *Śivalok,* requesting Śiva to do something to kill demons. Śiva asks Paraśurāma to go and kill all the demons. When Paraśurāma requests, "kindly give me all the multitudes or missiles", Mahadeva said, "O best of Bhṛgus what is the need of missiles weapons for you, you are Viṣṇu himself, not a man. Though you may not have missile and weapons, they [demons] are not worth to fight you.[20] When Paraśurāma kills Śālva and all the demons and comes back to Śiva to report, he gives him missiles saying: "O Rama having a great luck, I am satisfied by you, therefore I shall give you a collection of matchless missiles. O Bhārgava in this world only you are capable of holding this missile. Your patience is unique and your strength matchless. O my son, staying here you will gradually acquire the skill of the missile, and O Rāma, after getting the knowledge of all the missiles you will go to your father. O you, the sinless one this divine battle axe is given to you, whenever you throw, it will again come back to your hand. Similarly, this will be your designation; I shall remove your doubt."[21]

After the missile-giving episode, a long portion called the *Śaṅkara Gītā* constituting almost sixteen chapters is inserted in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.* As Kṛṣṇa preaches to Arjuna before sending him to war in the *Mahābhārata,* similarly Śiva preaches to Paraśurāma a Gita before another round of battle in the

Varuṇa loka or netherland in this Purāṇa. This section starts with a simple innocent question of Paraśurāma: "How to meditate upon you, Lord [Śiva]?" Then Śiva takes a circuitous route to explain how Śiva himself meditated upon Viṣṇu, and he describes various aspects of worship of Viṣṇu, excluding Paraśurāma. Śiva narrates the *māhātmya* of *bhakti, ahiṃsā* and *vratas* related to Viṣṇu.

The question is why should one make Śiva preach to Paraśurāma about the glories of Viṣṇu? The answer may be that since Paraśurāma himself was considered an avatāra of Viṣṇu, he cannot be preached to by Viṣṇu himself to worship Viṣṇu. Or, perhaps it would have seemed awkward to the Vaiṣṇavites to present Viṣṇu to preach his personal glory to one of his own avatāras. Therefore the redactor took the help of Śiva to preach to Viṣṇuism to Paraśurāma. This attempt to convert Paraśurāma from an avatāra of Viṣṇu to *bhakta* of Viṣṇu may have been inspired by similar Śaivite attempts and may reflect the latter stage of Paraśurāma's mythical evolution. After teaching this Vaiṣṇavite *Śaṅkara Gītā*, Śiva orders Paraśurāma to go to the netherworld and kill all the demons hiding in there, "who are difficult to be killed by the gods and are destroyable by human beings". Śiva gives him his own quiver full of arrows which is never exhausted and instructs him that when the work is over, he should give this quiver to Agastya, who will give it to Rāghava Rāma. "After seeing Rāghava Rāma, you do not take weapon in your hand, O Rāma. On seeing Rāma your lustre belonging to Viṣṇu will enter Rāghava for doing the works of the gods." Then Paraśurāma procceds to *Varuṇaloka*, and kills the demon king Ayahśaṅku. He does not challage Varuṇa as one finds in south Indian narratives; rather, he bows to him, prays to him, and receives wisdom regarding *kalpa, manvantara, yuga*.

Through these exercises the constant effort of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava redactors to bring Paraśurāma in to their own fold becomes very obvious. But the internal structure of Śivaism was such that inside this sect there was little scope for any other entity to claim equality with Śiva. When Śiva was pleased with Paraśurāma's penance, he said: "From today you are like Skanda

to me". There was no other place available for any figure in Śivaism except that of a devotee. This phenomenon is ritually and materially reflected in the absorption of Paraśurāma as a devotee of Śiva. Several south Indian traditions and many Paraśurāmeśvara temples are reflections of this trend. In contrast, the early phase of Viṣṇuism gives more equal status to other deities and Paraśurāma is highlighted as Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa/Govinda himself.

Finally, it would be interesting to note that Paraśurāma's forefather Bhṛgu had a decisive fight with Śiva at least on two occasions, one at a place called Pine Forest and another at Dakṣa's sacrifice. Bhṛgu was a friend of Dakṣa and wanted to marry Pārvatī. In fact, Bhṛgu was also punished with Dakṣa in that sacrifice. Even Śukra is shown in confrontation with Śiva and badly humiliated by the Lord. But significantly, myths related to Jamadagni are very sympathetic to Śiva. Rāma totally surrendered to him and is shown as a beneficiary of his grace. It seems that the Bhṛgus as a whole or a branch of the group were not comfortable with Śivaism in the early phase of its development but gradually a synthesis took place, especially in the region south of Vindhyas and in the Himalayas. This perhaps throws light on the changing or at least different preferences of cultic deities in a particular clan at different points of time.

Paraśurāma and Gaṇeśa

Paraśurāma's relationship with the two sons of Śiva and Pārvatī was very different. While Paraśurāma is shown to have a cordial and cooperative relationship with Kārttikeya/Subrahmaṇya, the encounter with Gaṇeśa is inimical and violent. It is also interesting that even Pārvatī does not have a favourable attitude towards Paraśurāma. In this context it is also important to note that in the Puranic traditions, while Subrahmaṇya is the son of Śiva but not of Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa is the son of Pārvatī but not of Śiva.[22] So, the Śiva-Subrahmaṇya cycle supports Paraśurāma while the Pārvatī-Gaṇeśa axis opposes and dislikes him.

Paraśurāma's encounter with Gaṇeśa has been described in great detail in at least two Purāṇa, viz. the *Brahmavaivartta*

Purāṇa[23] and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[24] and both accounts have a close similarity. This theme is not mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* which otherwise communicates almost all myths related to Paraśurāma, even the myth describing the closeness to Kārttikeya. It seems that this myth was developed in the Gaṇeśa cycle of myths and not in the Paraśurāma tradition. This encounter presents Gaṇeśa in a better light, and shows him to be more powerful than Paraśurāma but willingly receiving injury in order to respect Śiva's weapon.

Both these Purāṇas say that when Paraśurāma had already defeated Kārtavīrya and other kshatriyas, he visited *Śivaloka* to pay his respect to Śiva, but Gaṇeśa asked him to wait since Śiva was sleeping with Pārvatī. Paraśurāma was in a hurry and tried to enter forcibly. Thus a fight broke out between Gaṇeśa and Paraśurāma, which ultimately led to a fierce duel. Gaṇeśa expanded his trunk, tied Paraśurāma in it and subjected him to great pressure. This continued for some days and Paraśurāma could not do anything except watch helplessly. Gajānana extended his big trunk and tied Paraśurāma, moving him quickly, like a wheel. He lifted him with his trunk and showed him the different *lokas* in quick succession and returned him back to Kailāsa. Then Paraśurāma, feeling defeated, hurled the axe at Gaṇeśa. Gaṇeśa did not resist and received it on his tusk. These narratives portray the reaction of Pārvatī as a common woman angered at this incident and how Kṛṣṇa pacified her. This part of the narritive will be discussed later. The only difference between the two narratives is that while Pārvatī curses Paraśurāma for this act and ultimately Paraśurāma worships Gaṇeśa 'with a delightful heart' in the *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa,*[25] in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* Kṛṣṇa resolves the fight between Gaṇeśa and Paraśurāma and then they became friends and forget their bitter fight.

Clearly, this myth is explanatory in nature and seeks to explain the reason of Gaṇeśa being called *ekadanta*, one-toothed. The loss of a tooth/tusk is also used to boost his image of being a devotee of Śiva. Although Gaṇeśa is shown as quite a powerful deity who could hurl Paraśurāma away to different *lokas*, he is still shown

as offering no resistence to Śiva's axe. Moreover, as Kosambi has underlined, "conflict between gods generally reflects human group-conflict."[26] It is quite possible that this myth reverberates the friction between the Paraśurāma cult and the Gaṇapatyas of Maharashtra/western India. Perhaps both sects were vying for the same space at some point of time. It seems that it is the conflict with the Gāṇapatyas on the one hand and the followers of Dattātreya on the other, which shaped the contours of Paraśurāma cult in western India. These discourses also reflect the larger cultic conflicts and battles for supremacy in the sacred domain. In the *Śiva Purāṇa*, while ridiculing all the avatāras of Viṣṇu, Tāḍaka, the demon who was given a boon by Brahmā, says in the context of Paraśurāma: "In his sixth incarnation [as Paraśurāma] he cut off the head of his mother. The wicked man insulted his own preceptor's son."[27] This reference indicates the use of the Paraśurāma–Gaṇeśa conflict myth in the service of cultic domination.

Paraśurāma and Subrahmaṇya/Kārttikeya

It is interesting to question why, even though Paraśurāma had differences with Kārttikeya/Subrahmaṇya, there was no conflict in their relationship. Most of the references to Kārttikeya/Subrahmaṇya in Paraśurāma narratives give a very amicable and friendly relationship between the two. It is remarkable that when Paraśurāma was fighting with Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya was present but he is not shown as helping Gaṇeśa in any way. He takes a neutral position and tries to stop this war. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* says, "He seized both of them with his hands and pushed them away from each other".[28] Moreover, welcoming Paraśurāma and asking him to fight the demons Śiva said: "From today you shall be like Skanda to me."[29] Therefore, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* hints at a cordial relationship between the Paraśurāma and Skanda/Kārttikeya.

The most intimate relation between Paraśurāma and Subrahamaṇya has been depicted in the *Keralamāhātmya*,[30] which is a medieval text. It is also called *Agastyasaṃhitā* and gives the

mythological history of Kerala. In this text, Subrahmaṇya helps Paraśurāma in founding a new kingdom and, in turn, Paraśurāma erects many temples for Skanda and also creates a new city, called Subrahamaṇyapuri. Subrahamaṇya also received a part of the newly created area. Paraśurāma aided Subrahmaṇya in the slaughter of Tāḍakāsura as well as in the latter's marriage with Valli and Devasenā.[31]

The *Keralamāhātmya* says that after Paraśurāma donated the earth as an expiation of sin of matricide and kshatriya slaughter, he had no place to live in the land gifted by him. Paraśurāma then went to Kailāsa and appealed to Śiva for help. The Lord asked Paraśurāma to request the ocean for a piece of land. To help him in this matter, Śiva sent Subrahmaṇya with a promise to Paraśurāma that all the divinities, including himself, would be present in the land created by him. Paraśurāma and Subrahmaṇya proceeded southward and Subrahmaṇya created Kumari and asked Paraśurāma to worship her for a year. Paraśurāma did accordingly and Varuṇa appeared before them at the end of the year. Paraśurāma requested Varuṇa for some living space and Subrahmaṇya also mediated on the behalf of his friend. At the behest of Varuṇa, Paraśurāma threw his axe from the place where he stood and the axe fell at Gōkarṇa. Śiva, Kṛṣṇa and other divinities descended to the new land which is called Kerala.[32]

Although there are quite a few literary references pointing to the rivalry between Paraśurāma and Subrahmaṇya,[33] some indication of this conflict between the two can be seen in the *Padma Purāṇa* also, which is otherwise unexplainable.[34] It is significant that even the *Keralamāhātmya* refers in detail to the mace fight at Subrahmaṇyapuri between Subrahmaṇya and Paraśurāma. The fight ends in a stalemate and Paraśurāma established an institution for the practice of arms at Subrahmayṇapuri. A Malayalam text called *Keralotpatti* also mentions the aforementioned fight, as well as the establishment of a school and the practice of arms. Paraśurāma establishes such an institution not only in Subrahmaṇyapuri but in other places also, like Mūkāmbi and Tirunāvāy.[35]

From these details it is clear that the Subrahmaṇya cult undoubtedly had a kind of ambivalent relationship with the Paraśurāma cult. On the one hand, they had friendly and cordial associations; on the other, rivalry and conflict accompanies their relationship. Perhaps it represents two different phases or regions of their cultic expansion. It seems that in the later phase, these two cults came more into conflict with each other because earlier the Purāṇas reflect only a cordial relationship while the later regional texts give information of conflict as well as friendship. However, even the Subrahmaṇya cult, like many others, tried to claim a share in the achievements of Paraśurāma. The myth of Skanda's help to Paraśurāma, creation of Kanyākumari and then Skanda's arguments with Varuṇa on the behalf of his friend to give a piece of land, all point to that direction. These narratives not only reduce the lustre and prowess of Paraśurāma, but also gives some credit to Subrahmaṇya. Yet, interestingly, this help was not a one-way process. Paraśurāma also helped Skanda/ Subrahamaṇya in the slaughter of Tāḍakāsura as well as in his marriage with Valli and Devasenā. In this sense, this association of Paraśurāma with Subrahmaṇya is quite different from all others in the domain of divinities.

Jāmadagneya Rāma and Dāśarathī Rāma

The myth of the defeat of Paraśurāma at the hands of Dāśarathī Rāma has received the most explicit attention from a large number of scholars. It has been used as evidence of low popularity and virtually no influence of Paraśurāma in the cultic circles.[36] Besides, it has been also seen as the reflection of brahmana-kshatriya tension in ancient India in association with his Kārtavīrya and kshatriya annihilation myths. One study has also demonstrated that there are close parallels among the confrontation between Paraśurāma and Dāśarathī Rāma in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the battle between Paraśurāma and Bhīṣma in the *Mahābhārata*.[37] It seems that this myth of conflict between the two Rāmas was inspired by the narrative of Paraśurāma's defeat at the hands of Bhīṣma described in the *Mahābhārata*. There is a possibility that a pre-existing myth

about a battle between two heroes was put to cultic use in the later period to boost the image of another Rāma. Some of the aspects of these two conflicts have already been discussed in earlier chapter. Therefore, it would be useful to study the remaining aspects of this myth which find frequent mention in the epics and Purāṇas.

As far as the *Mahābhārata* is concerned, this myth of conflict between Dāśarathī Rāma and Jāmadgneya Rāma appears in the Tīrthayātrāparva of *Āraṇyakaparva*[38] in the context of Bhṛgutīrtha "celebrated in the three worlds", which Yudhiṣṭhira and his party is said to have visited. Sage Lomaśa narrates this story. This story relates how, due to the animosity towards Dāśarathī Rāma, Jāmadagneya Rāma lost his lustre and how he recovered it after taking a bath in this *tīrtha*.

This myth is a typical example of how the *Mahābhārata* kept on growing until recent times and addition of various legends, which suited the religious and cultic beliefs of the redactors took place. This myth has been incongruously inserted between two halves of the Agastya legend, with which it has no connection at all. Further, the passage is entirely missing in the Southern and Kashmir recensions. The story gets some prominence in the *Rāmāyaṇa* but appears quite out of harmony with the context of the *Mahābhārata*. Most of the deeds of Paraśurāma have been mentioned more than once in the *Mahābhārata* but this episode is not found either in the *Rāmopākhyāna* of the *Mahābhārata* or anywhere else.[39] In fact, Brockington has argued that both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* versions of the conflict with Rāma are interpolations.[40] However, as Adalbert Gail has pointed out it has been used by Kālidāsa in his *Raghuvaṃśa*.[41]

As far as the Purāṇas are concerned, the *Padma* and *Narasiṃha* Purāṇas present this story in detail. But the *Agni* and *Viṣṇu* Purāṇas mention it in passing. The *Agni Purāṇa*[42] says: "Then Śatrughna and Bharata married Śrutakirti and Māṇḍavī, the two daughters of the brother of Janaka. Rāma [Dāśarathī] after conquering Jāmadagneya [Paraśurāma] went to Ayodhyā with [sage] Vasiṣṭha and others and Bharata with Śatrughna went towards [the country

of] Yudhājit [Maternal uncle of Bharata]." This is a part of the *Rāmacarita* narrated in this Purāṇa.

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*,[43] while describing the story of Rāma, summarises the *Rāmāyaṇa* and his other major achievements of Rāma [Dāśarathī]. Therefore, as an important landmark, the Rāma and Paraśurāma encounter is given substantial space in most of the narratives of Dāśarathī Rāma. The text says, "He [Rāma] humbled the pride of Paraśurāma who vaunted his triumphs over the race of Haihayas and repeated slaughters of the kshatriya tribe."

The *Padma Purāṇa*[44] gives the most elaborate treatment to this legend, which is also part of the narrative related to Rāma Dāśarathī. It says that, while coming back from Ayodhyā with his retinue, Rāma was stopped on the way by Paraśurāma who wanted to test his valour. Paraśurāma said, "... O best of Raghu ... fight with me ... This is Viṣṇu's bow ... fix [an arrow to it] then 'I am vanquished [by you] with your valour .... If you are afraid in your heart, then submit to me, O Kākustha.' Rāma easily fixed the arrow and said, "O brahmana what should I do to you with best arrow? Do I cut off this world, the nether world or heaven or should I destroy your penance?" Paraśurāma got frightened and said, "O Rāma...I did not know you to be the ancient [soul]...You are... Viṣṇu...Vāsudeva... Nārāyaṇa... Please forgive my rash behaviour towards you." Paraśurāma was, however, deprived of his lustre and penance. But then Rāma saluted the great sage. He duly worshipped him with water for washing his feet and then Paraśurāma went away to the hermitage of Nara-Nārāyaṇa to practise penance. The *Padma Purāṇa* counts it among the major achievements of Rāma.[45] The *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*[46] also narrates this story in almost similar language. But the nature of the encounter is milder than that of the *Padma Purāṇa.* Here Paraśurāma is not subjected to any significant humiliation. The test of the bow and arrow also does not take place, nor is any *tīrtha* myth associated with it.

This theme of the defeat of Paraśurāma became very popular in almost all versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and other variants of Śri Rāma stories. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki,[47] this story is placed

after Rāma's marraige and departure for Ayodhyā with his entourage [see Introduction]. This version described by Vālmīki shows familiarity with all myths of Paraśurāma, including those which belong to a relatively later period such as the lineage myths establishing a relationship between Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra. Therefore the *Rāmāyaṇa* version of this myth seems to be from a later period than the rest of Paraśurāma myths.

The *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*[48] also describes this incident in great detail and says, "Paraśurāma swooned by the power of Viṣṇu [Rāma] and fell down on the ground. After a while, however, he regained his senses and offered obeisance to that great power. Gods found him to be completely disheartened, sad and perplexed. So they asked him to go on pilgrimage to a lake known as Diptoda where his ancestor Bhṛgu performed penance. Accordingly he went on a pilgrimage after which his power and energy were restored." This narrative has a close similarity with that of the Āraṇyakaparva of the *Mahābhārata* .

Goswami Tulasīdāsa [1532–1625CE] in his *Rāmacharitamānas* has narrated this story in slightly changed circumstances and in such a way, that it severely affected the image of Paraśurāma. In this text the whole episode is described in the setting of Janaka's court and not on the way to Ayodhyā, as described in most of the texts/versions. But the most important change he makes is that the entire dialogue is between Lakṣmaṇa and Paraśurāma. Rāma is shown as the ultimate symbol of calm, poise and compassion. Lakṣmaṇa provokes Paraśurāma, who shows himself as an extremely irritable, self-praising and cruel personality, who had no control over himself. In fact, this is the image of Paraśurāma, which is being held by most of the people in northern and eastern India today. In other versions Rāma also loses his temper, therefore, it becomes a conflict between two heroes. In the *Rāmacharitamānas*, Rāma does not even pull the bowstring. Most of the attention is paid to the heated arguments and disparaging remarks by Lakṣmaṇa to Paraśurāma and at the end, without any effort or resistance, Paraśurāma surrendered to Śri Rāma. The entire motive of this incident is to show that how composed behaviour

and calmness wins over extreme anger. *Ahiṃsā* is a state of mind and not mere renunciation of weapons or violence. Rāma met Paraśurāma's challenge with reason, patience and perseverance and even in the face of provocation, and repeated demands to engage in battle, he remained unruffled. Hence haughty Paraśurāma had to concede his defeat to the rational approach of Rāma. This was in a way the final defeat of Paraśurāma in the Gangetic heartland, where this myth reflects a virtual take over of Paraśurāma shrines by Rāma.[49]

Some of the folk *Rāmāyaṇas* present this story in a different manner. For example, in the *Karbi Rāmāyaṇa* Paraśurāma is named as Rangpo Kather or Rang Kather who offered resistance to Rāma. Rāma asked him not to challenge but Paraśurāma did not restrained himself, therefore Rāma killed him. Yet another version of the same *Rāmāyaṇa* says that Paraśurāma invited Rāma and Lakṣamaṇa to fight. Lakṣamaṇa stretched his hand and asked him to strike. Paraśurāma tried to strike with his big axe, which was so big that it touched the sky, but it could not hurt Lakṣmaṇa. Since he could not do anything, therefore he fled away saying that he was taking their power with him. It was held that this is why Rāma could not kill the Golden Deer.[50]

A very interesting version comes from *Khotani Rāmāyaṇa.* Khotan is a place in China near Tibet. This *Rāmāyaṇa* is almost like a Buddhist Jātaka Story. This version mixes the stories of Sahasrabāhu and Rāma Dāśarathī and gives a completely different picture in which Rāma is said to have stayed in exile due to fear of Paraśurāma. It says: "There was a victorious king called Daśaratha. He had a brave son named Sahasrabāhu. One day Sahasrabāhu went to the jungle to hunt. There, a brahmana was doing penance, who had a *Kāmadhenu* and a *chiñtāmaṇi* [Wish-fulfilling cow and a magic stone], which used to fulfil all his desires. Due to the power of these two things, the brahmana gave a big feast to a king and his relatives. Sahasrabāhu demanded the *Kāmadhenu* and then forcefully took it away. That brahmana had only one son, named Paraśurāma, who had acquired an axe through severe penance. Paraśurāma vanquished Sahasrabāhu. Sahasrabāhu

had two sons Raismana and Rāma. Their mother had hidden them in a secret place. After twelve years both these boys emerged from that place. Raismana was expert in financial matters and Rāma in weapons and wars. When these two boys came to know that their father had been killed by Paraśurāma, they started searching for him immediately. They captured Paraśurāma from the mountains and not only killed him but also annihilated eighteen lakh brahmanas.[51]

All these versions show what an important role this myth has played in the Śri Rāma cycle of myths. This myth has been utilised by many literary figures to illustrate their depictions. For example, in *Bhaṭṭikāvya*,[52] poet Bhaṭṭi has beautifully described the state of mind of Daśaratha as an anxious father on this occasion and the valour of Śri Rāma. Bhavabhūti, [700 CE] in his drama called *Mahāvīracarita* has given a different version of this episode. It says that a minister of Rāvaṇa came to Mahendra Parvat along with Śūrpaṇakhā to meet Paraśurāma. They provoked him by giving him details of the breaking of Śiva's bow by Śri Rāma and his prowess. Paraśurāma moved quickly and entered Daśratha's palace without permission and challenged Rāma to fight, but finally he got defeated. Thereafter he offered an apology and wanted to expiate. But Viśvāmitra said that all his lapses and his sense of ego had been wiped away by the touch of Rāma. In this version, Bhavabhūti heaps a lot of praise on Paraśurāma which has been expressed through Śri Rāma. But ultimately all these versions serve the purpose of establishing the contrast between the personality of forgiving Rāma and avenging Paraśurāma.

The importance of this legend does not lie only in making of Dāśarathī Rāma a powerful persona but also in weakening the power of the other Rāma in the Vaiṣṇava circle. Since Paraśurāma is generally called Rāma in most of the ancient and early medieval texts, therefore, some kind of confusion might have prevailed among the followers of Dāśarathī Rāma due to the similarity of these names. Hence in order to contrast the two, the elements of axe and anger was over emphasised in Paraśurāma. He was made to surrender completely and in the end the cult of Dāśarathī Rāma

virtually took over the cult of Paraśurāma. The second possibility may indicate that this myth of defeat was a product of that period when Paraśurāma was being dethroned as an avatāra and converted into a *bhakta*, not only of Śiva but even Viṣṇu and his other avatāras such as Rāma and Krisna. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* clearly delinate that phase when Paraśurāma is increasingly portrayed as *bhakta* of Śiva and Viṣṇu. This myth of defeat may have initiated that developmental process.

One cannot but agree with this view: "It is usual with each cult or sect to show the greatness of its own deity. Through myths, legends and anecdotes each faith or creed tries to prove the superiority of its favourite deity over other gods and divinities. Hindu mythology is full of inter-cult rivalry. From time immemorial different sects like Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta and Gāṇapatyas contend among themselves for supremacy."[53]

Another important question arising from this context is whether this myth should be interpreted as a symbol of the brahmana–kshatriya conflict. It seems that there is more possibility of inter-cult rivalry than of *varṇa* conflict, as undoubtedly the author and propagators of this myth were also brahmanas. Even if we doubt the brahmanical linkages of Vālmīki, the lineage of Tulasīdāsa is almost agreed upon, whose portrayal of Paraśurāma is much more negative than that of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is also reflective of the fact that despite brahmanas being the 'literary guardians' of society, they were not completely free to depict everything in the favour of their own *varṇa*. Perhaps they were intensely dictated to by their patronage and clientele, at least more than scholars of the period would like to believe.

Paraśurāma, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma

In sharp contrast to Dāśarathī Rāma, Paraśurāma's relationship with that of Kṛṣṇa is portrayed in a very cordial manner. However, it should be noted that the ultimate object of the Kṛṣṇa cult is also similar to that of the cult of Rāma Dāśarathī, i.e. endorsement of the greatness of Kṛṣṇa and the absorption of the Paraśurāma cult within its fold. But this is done in a friendly manner and by

respecting each other's dignity. This may symbolise that the worshippers of Kṛṣṇa and Paraśurāma were close to each other, or that there might have been a common group of people responsible for the spread of both these cults in some of the regions. The mutually complementary relationship created the scope for adjustment and help rather than a showdown or a tutelary status as in the case of Rāma and Śiva respectively. Allusion to Paraśurāma as an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa/Govinda should also be seen in that context. In fact, closer ties between the mythical Bhṛgus and the Yadu clan might also have had a crucial role in this regard.

As far as the *Mahābhārata* is concerned, the most repeated theme is Paraśurāma's endorsement of Kṛṣṇa as the primary cause of creation and as God incarnate. For example, Bhīṣma and Droṇāchārya quote Paraśurāma in the Bhagvadyānaparva of Udyogaparva[54] and said to Duryodhana, "As Rāma Jāmdagneya has already told you, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are God incarnate and even gods themselves cannot win them over. Therefore, you should not go for war and try to reach a compromise."

The most important narrative in this context is that of Dambhodbhava, related by Paraśurāma in the court of the Kauravas, where Paraśurāma is neither a hero nor an avatāra, but only a simple *ṛṣi* appearing with many other such sages.[55] This story narrates the greatness of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the presence of Kṛṣṇa himself. When Kṛṣṇa came to the Kaurava court as the emissary of the Pāṇḍavas and tried to convince the Kauravas to accept the proposal of peace, Paraśurāma, Kaṇva, Nārada, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Vidura and Dhṛtarāṣṭra try to convince Duryodhana about the futility of war and the virtue of compromise, which Duryodhana rejects completely.

The story describes how an arrogant king named Dambhodbhava, who thought that no one could defeat him, reached the hermitage of Nara-Nārāyaṇa along with his six-fold army and asked them to engage in a battle with him. When, despite repeated requests to go away the king insisted on fighting a battle, Nara took a handful of grass sticks and threw them at the king's army. The entire sky was filled with arrow-like sticks and the king's

army was destroyed in no time. Then Dambhodbhava fell at the feet of the two sages. Nara forgave him and asked him to take special care of brahmanas and never become arrogant about his power. At the end of the story Paraśurāma reveals to Duryodhana that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are Nara-Nārāyaṇa themselves. So he should not even dream of winning a war with them. Duryodhana is asked to let better sense prevail and avoid any chance of war, which will ruin his kingdom.

Similar myths have also been repeated in other parts of the *Mahābhārata*. For example, after the end of the Dambhodbhava story, Droṇa again quotes Paraśurāma who is supposed to have said that Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are supreme Gods and even all gods together cannot win them over in any war.[56] The story of Dambhodbhava is recalled again by Śalya to Karṇa and Karṇa was asked to remember that his guru Paraśurāma himself had declared Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa as ancient souls and God incarnate and therefore Karṇa cannot defeat them.[57] Another portion of Āraṇyakaparva mentions that Draupadi eulogies Kṛṣṇa, when he comes to visit the Pāṇḍavas in the forest after they lose in the game of dice. Draupadī says to Kṛṣṇa, "You are Viṣṇu, you are sacrificer, you are sacrifice and the ultimate as Jamdagninandan Paraśurāma has said."[58]

But the endorsement of Kṛṣṇa as supreme God by Paraśurāma is not just a one-way affair. Even Kṛṣṇa is made to make many statements showing Paraśurāma to be a divine being and his own avatāra. In the Śāntiparva, Kṛṣṇa narrates his own various avatāras and says that in the *tretā yuga* he will be born as *Bhṛgu kulabhūṣaṇa* Rāma to annihilate all the kshatriyas along with their armies and various kinds of vehicles.[59] Even in the *Gītā* Kṛṣṇa says, "Among wielders of arms I am Rāma."[60] It is widely accepted that the references to Rāma in the *Gītā* are related to Bhārgava Rāma and not Dāśarathī Rāma.[61]

It is also significant that in the Śāntiparva, Kṛṣṇa himself is made to narrate the story of Paraśurāma which has already been extensively commented upon in the earlier chapter. In the South Indian recension, the battle between Paraśurāma and Śālva is

described as an unsuccessful exercise.[62] After killing all the kshatriyas, Paraśurāma performed a great sacrifice and gave away massive gifts/*dakṣiṇā* to brahmanas ... And then he fought with King Śālva who was sitting in his *saubh vimāna* [Flying chariot] for hundred years. Then Paraśurāma heard from the mouth of *nagnika kumāris* [Virgin goddesses] the following injunction, "O Rāma, O great Bhṛgu, you lay down your arms. You cannot destroy this *saubh vimāna*, Viṣṇu himself along with Pradyumna and Sāmba will fight with Śālva and destroy his *saubh vimāna*." After hearing this, Paraśurāma instantly left for the forest. He threw away all his weapons, axe and bow in the water and started penance.

Interestingly, the text adds that Paraśurāma stopped his war with Śālva just out of respect for those *nagnikās,* otherwise he was neither helpless nor incapable of destroying Śālva. It was also said that Jamdagninandana Paraśurāma, a glorious *ṛṣi*, was a part of Kṛṣṇa himself. But it is difficult to rationalise the fact that if Paraśurāma was also an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa himself, then why could he not be shown as defeating Śālva. Was it meant to boost Kṛṣṇa's image by showing that he defeated someone who could not be defeated even by Paraśurāma, the annihilator of the entire kshatriya clan of the earth ? In this segment of the Southern recension, there is an attempt to incorporate the Paraśurāma myth within the cycle of Kṛṣṇa mythology. But the encounter with Kṛṣṇa is not a violent one as one finds in the case of Śri Rāma. At one place this narrative says that Kārtavīrya was very powerful and Kṛṣṇa himself took birth in the Bhṛgu clan to kill him. But Kṛṣṇa is not linked to the kshatriya killing here.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[63] also echoes a similar kind of cordial and mutually helpful relationship between Paraśurāma and Kṛṣṇa along with Balarāma. But in this story Paraśurāma is not shown as an avatāra of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. It says, "Being desirous of seeing Gomanta, the best of the mountains, and the great fortress at its top, both of them set out in the morning from Mathura and proceeded to the south. The glorious Lord Hari accompanied by Balarāma crossed the Yamuna and passes through many countries, rivers, mountains and hills. While passing that way, they saw on

a raised part of the forest an extraordinarily distinguished sage sitting under a tree. The sage had a mass of matted locks. He was clad in bark garments and the hide of a deer and had a *kamaṇḍalu* [a water pot of a gourd] by his side. He was glorious like the sun in lustre. He subsisted on spiritual knowledge and bliss and was surrounded by hundreds of disciples. Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, the protectors of the world, were extremely glad to see him. Both the heroes with due formality and alertness paid their respect to him. The glorious Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke to the prominent sage as follows: "I bow to you, O Paraśurāma of the Bhārgava Clan!, O glorious son of Jamadagni, I who regarded penance as wealth! We are known as Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa. Have our names reached your ears?" The noble Paraśurāma with his eyes blooming with affection spoke: "Welcome to you, the best one among the Yadus and to your noble-souled elder brother. I know that you are the super-sensuous Lord who are born in the Yadu clan. You are the primary cause of all the effects [created things]. You are the ancient most person in this universe. Salutation to you, O lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, the sole cause of all the worlds. For what purpose are both of you, whom the universe pays respects, have arrived here?" Thus inquired by Paraśurāma, the son of Jamdagni, Balrāma and Kṛṣṇa spoke: "We desire to see Gomanta for the inaccessible fortress on its top, O powerful Lord!." Hearing that Paraśurāma spoke to Kṛṣṇa: "May it be so, O mighty armed one! You may go with your elder brother to Gomanta. At the foot of that hill, there is a city of Karavira protected by Śṛgāla Vāsudeva. But he will not tolerate you [encroaching]. After killing him in a battle, you may occupy the mount called Gomanta. "Thus instructed by Paraśurāma, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa, took leave of the omniscient sage and proceeded to the southern direction. Both of them saw the mount Gomanta covered with big trees ..."

There is no hint at Paraśurāma himself being an avatāra in this narrative. Second, this narrative doesn't make any difference in the career of any personality involved or in the immediate course of events. Therefore, it seems to be a mechanism to get Kṛṣṇa endorsed as the prime cause of all effects and an ancient soul by

Paraśurāma. In a way, it serves the same kind of purpose as defeat at the hands of Dāśarathī Rāma and subsequent acceptance of his greatness by Paraśurāma. Only, the events here are less dramatic and derogatory than in the case of the encounter with Dāśarathī Rāma. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* [64] also hints at the meeting of Balarāma with Paraśurāma during his pilgrimage.

Among the Purāṇas, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa,* notwithstanding its Śaiva orientation, ascribes a very important place to Paraśurāma's relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Here Kṛṣṇa plays an important role in the narrative of Paraśurāma. The tension between Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva traditions that arose due to the efforts at the appropriation of the Paraśurāma cult become very clear in this text. After Paraśurāma visited *Śivaloka* in order to gain weapons and powers to defeat Kārtavīrya, Śiva gave him an important *kavacha* for protection. In a later chapter, the *kavacha* is described as *'gopijana-vallabhāya svāhā'*.[65]

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa play a very important role in pacifying Pārvatī after Paraśurāma's fight with Gaṇeśa.[66] Perhaps the redactor of this section was mainly interested in establishing a cordial relationship amongst the Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta and Gāṇapatyas. Kṛṣṇa and Śiva together gave a boon to Paraśurāma. When asked what the latter wanted, Paraśurāma said he wanted to be a devotee of both Kṛṣṇa and Śiva. Pārvatī gave him a boon to be so. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa gave boons to Gaṇeśa also. A very happy and tension-free scenario is portrayed in this section, in which ultimately Kṛṣṇa had a leading role. It is quite possible that the Kṛṣṇa cult might have played a crucial role in establishing harmony between Śivaism and Viṣṇuism on the one hand and between the Paraśurāma, Gaṇapati and Kārttikeya cults on the other. In a way, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* symbolises how efforts were being made to establish harmony between different sects and cult figures. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* has three sections. The first one depicts Paraśurāma as a devotee of Śiva, in the second he is propitiating Kṛṣṇa and in the third one, both Śiva and Kṛṣṇa are brought together. It seems that all three sections were composed at different times and perhaps also by different people. The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* also follows

the larger pattern of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* narratives; nevertheless, due to its unsympathetic attitude to Paraśurāma it does not show the relationship with Kṛṣṇa on an equal or respectable footing, which could be seen in many other Purāṇas. In the *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* Kṛṣṇa says, "O Paraśurāma you are aptly guilty according to *śāstras* when you have broken the tooth of Gaṇeśa in anger and are hostile to him at this moment." [67] There is no effort here to establish friendship between the two as we find in the case of *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa;* rather, Kṛṣṇa orders him to worship Gaṇeśa at the end. There is no warmth or closeness in his behaviour, which is so common in many other Purāṇas.

Paraśurāma and Dattātreya

The myth of Dattātreya played an important role in the Paraśurāma legend. The Akṛtavraṇa version doesn't refer to the relationship between Kārtavīrya and Dattātreya but, the Śāntiparva alludes to it. Dattātreya's close connection with Kārtavīrya and the Haihayas is also hinted at in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* [68] which says: "It is by the dust of his [Dattātreya] lotus like feet that Yadus, Haihayas and others got their bodies [themselves] purified and attained excellence in Yoga, leading to prosperity here and hereafter." It is quite possible that different tribes and constituents of the Haihaya clan like Vītihotra, Haihaya, Tuṇḍikera, etc. who were important in the Trans-Vindhya region [see chapter one] were the main patrons of this sect. Therefore, they brought their hero Kārtavīrya and their patron saint Dattātreya under the ambit of one mythology and propagated the glory of both.

As far as Dattātreya's relationship with Paraśurāma is concerned, neither ever faced each other in any early account. In most of the early narratives, Dattātreya is only the patron saint of Kārtavīrya, who received boons from him to become a powerful king. The general image of Dattātreya is primarily of a teacher of Yoga, which he taught to various people, including Alarka and Prahlāda.[69] But gradually, the image of Dattātreya as an avatāra started growing and became very significant in some of the texts.[70] The *Garuḍa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas*[71] mention him as the sixth

avatāra of Viṣṇu, in a list comprising twenty two incarnations. In some of the Purāṇas Dattātreya appears to take the place of Paraśurāma in these lists. Such replacements may not be casual, considering Dattātreya's favourable disposition towards Kārtavīrya.[72]

However, two later texts show an attempt by the Dattātreya cult to subjugate and appropriate the Paraśurāma cult within itself. For instance, the *Tripura Rahasya* says that Dattātreya first composed the *Datta Saṃhitā* on Tripura worship in about 18,000 verses. Later, Paraśurāma abridged this text into a text containing 6,000 sūtras divided into 50 sections. It is said that Paraśurāma simplified this text in order to make tedious Śrī Vidyā understandable to common man. Still later, Sumedha, belonging to the Hārita *gotra*, who was a disciple of Paraśurāma, further abridged and simplified this version in ten sections, which exist even now in the form of a conversation between Paraśurāma and Dattātreya. Since Dattātreya had primarily an image of a teacher, this cult tried to bring Paraśurāma within its own fold as a disciple of Dattātreya.

The same kind of image is repeated in the *Datta Purāṇa*[73] composed by Vāsudevanand Saraswasti, which narrates that after donating the entire earth to Kaśyapa Paraśurāma went to Dattātreya who was living in Āmalaki grāma in the Sahya mountains and became his disciple. Goddess Tripura is identified with Reṇukā[74] in this text. Reṇukā herself inspired Paraśurāma to become the disciple of Dattātreya to learn various kinds of sciences. Obviously these are very late traditions. Nevertheless they throw certain light on how different attempts were made to incorporate the Paraśurāma cult by incorporating different components and achievements.

Paraśurāma and Kalki

Among the major avatāras, Kalki, the future avatāra, has the closest similarity with Paraśurāma. Not only is Kalki born into the family of a brahmana,[75] but punishes the erring kshatriyas to establish the rule of *dharma*. Kalki also acquired his own weapons from Śiva. Although it is needless to point out that the Kalki is different

in many respects and, in fact, elaboration of his myth was done in perhaps late medieval period. Yet it is important to note that the *Kalki Purāṇa* not only recounts the deeds of Paraśurāma as an avatāra, especially the killing of Kārtavīrya and annihilation of Kshatriyas twenty-one times,[76] but he is associated with the life of Kalki in a very significant way from the very beginning.

The *Kalki Purāṇa* mentions that Paraśurāma came to see the new-born avatāra along with Kṛpa, Droṇa and Vyāsa. They attended his *jātakarma saṃsakāra.* On this occasion they came in disguise as beggars.[77] This symbolism has been used prominently in *bhakti* literature in the context of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. So it seems that the beggar motif may have been borrowed from there. The role of the guru played by Paraśurāma is also important. When Kalki went in search of a guru, Paraśurāma invited him to come to him and learn all the Vedas, Vedāṅga, and Dhanurveda, etc. Kalki happily accepted the offer and learnt every thing from him. When Kalki asked about *gurudakṣiṇā* after the completion of his education, Paraśurāma replied, "You are an incarnation of Viṣṇu, who has come to end the excesses of the Kali age; you do the same and restore virtue, that is my fee."[78] Kalki's wife Ramā was blessed with two sons because she successfully performed *Rukmiṇivrata* as per Paraśurāma's instructions.[79]

Paraśurāma and Goddesses

It is surprising that despite the general trend, Paraśurāma has rarely been associated with any female divinity as spouse. Probably in order to bring him in harmony with other avatāras, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* describes the Earth as the spouse of Paraśurāma. It says: "...For in the like manner as the lord of the world, the god of gods, Janārdana, descends amongst mankind [in various shapes] so does his coadjuttrix Śrī ... When he was born as Rāma, of the race of Bhṛgu [Paraśurāma] she was Dharaṇi; when he was Rāghava she was Sītā; and when he was Kṛṣṇa, she was Rukmiṇi. In other descents of Viṣṇu, she is his associate.[80] The *Skanda Purāṇa* also says that Dharaṇi was the name of his consort.[81] But such accounts could not become popular either among Puranic redactors or

popular narratives. However, as regards as other goddesses in the later phase we have allusions to some correspondences with the narratives of Pārvatī, Rādhā and Kālī.

Paraśurāma's relationship with Pārvatī is projected as quite a strained one in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa,* which provides the most important account in this regard. When Paraśurāma reached *Śivaloka* to beg help from Śiva, he introduced himself and narrated how he had vowed to exterminate the kshatriyas twenty-one times. Hearing this, Durgā [Pārvatī?], the counterpart of Śiva, started laughing and said "... out of anger you wish to make this earth devoid of kings twenty-one times. Great indeed is your daring rashness, O boy! Without any weapon you wish to kill Arjuna, the king with a thousand arms, by whom even Rāvaṇa was contemptuously discomfited ... to him the coat [kavacha] of mail of Lord Viṣṇu had been given as also *Śakti* of excess potentiality. How do you aspire to kill him? Lord Śaṅkara, the ocean of mercy is competent to make it otherwise. None other than Śaṅkara, dear son, can carry out a noble deed."[82] Thus, an inherent sarcasm is portrayed, belittling the prowess of Paraśurāma.

This antagonism reaches its zenith when Paraśurāma cuts off one of the tusks of Gaṇeśa. It seems the aforementioned narrative was developed after the composition of the myth related to the Gaṇeśa–Paraśurāma conflict, which formed the attitude of the redactor towards the Paraśurāma–Pārvatī relationship. The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* informs us that after uprooting one of the tusks of Gaṇeśa, Paraśurāma forcibly approached Śiva. Pārvatī did not take to it kindly and reprimanded Paraśurāma for his unbecoming behaviour vis-à-vis Gaṇeśa, and even refused to receive him.[83]

An almost similar account occurs in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.*[84] It states, "..Pārvatī saw Gaṇeśa with bent snout and single tusk. .. On hearing the detailed report of the incident, Pārvatī became very angry. She spoke to Śaṅkara ".. this is your disciple Bhārgava who was treated at par with your sons. O Lord it was from you that he acquired *kavacha* of great splendour... [with which] he defeated Kārtavīryārjuna. After achieving his own object, he has now given

you the requisite fees. Undoubtedly you will be satisfied with this state of affairs. Protect this Bhārgava, your excellent disciple, O Śambhu. He will execute all the tasks of yours. I shall not stay here, O Lord, since I have been slighted and dishonoured by you. I shall go to the abode of my father accompanied by both my sons. Good men treat even the son of their maid-servant on a par with their own son, but your own son has not been consoled by you. Hence I am distressed. I shall go away." Śiva sought to mollify Pārvatī through the grace of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. On being appeased by Rādhā, Pārvatī became delighted. She lifted up Rāma who had fallen at her feet. Then Paraśurāma presented an omnibus prayer eulogising all members of Śiva's family as well as Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa for helping him out at a crucial moment.

Finally, Rādhā asked the Bhārgava "Dear Rāma I am delighted with you, what boon shall I grant you?" Rāma said, "Grant me this boon that I shall become the devotee of Kṛṣṇa and his beloved as well as of Bhava [Śiva] and his beloved." Pārvatī said: "Let it be so." Therefore, this entire narrative has a distinct mixture of conflict and compromise between Śivaism and Viṣṇuism. But in this process Paraśurāma has been turned into a mere devotee of these two gods and he has been deprived of all the glory that was attributed to him at one point of time.

However, in the *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* Pārvatī says very harsh words to Paraśurāma on both occasions. First, when he comes to beg Śiva for help, Pārvatī says: "Thou hast the audacity to cherish the aspiration to rid the kshatriyas ... it does not lie in thy power to kill him [Kārtavīrya], go home. What can Śiva do in this matter? Thou art a regular fool."[85] The second time, after Paraśurāma breaks the tooth of Gaṇeśa, she gives expression to her anger in these words: "After having acquired the infallible axe through the favour of the all-merciful Lord Śiva, you have been puffed up with conceit. ..You ought to pay fee to your religious percepter for the knowledge acquired by you. Did you pay that fee by breaking the tooth of his son? Why do you not behead him now? You have subdued Gaṇeśa and yet you have the face to meet us here. *For this fault of yours you will never be held auspicious by*

the people nor will you be worshipped by any one in the world."[86] This narrative is likely to have been composed at such a time and space [perhaps 11th century Bengal] where the worship of Paraśurāma had already lost the ground and the same is expressed through the words of Pārvatī.

In the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, Kālī also does not stay behind in this race of appropriation of different aspects, achievements and powers of Paraśurāma. Kālī claims that whatever Paraśurāma did was due to her grace and boons. For instance, when Paraśurāma was waging a war with Kārtavīrya and aiming at an important king called Suchandra, he found that the latter was too strong to be defeated. He also found that all his weapons were futile and suddenly discovered that goddess Kālī was standing in front of Suchandra to protect him. Then Paraśurāma propitiated the goddess with an elaborate *stuti* [eulogy]. The goddess was pleased and only after that did she grant the boon that enabled Paraśurāma to gain victory in the war.[87] The *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*[88] repeats an almost similar narrative; however, it devotes a much larger space to the description of the *mantra* and *kavacha* of goddess Kālī.

Thus, interaction of the Paraśurāma cycle of myths with the cycles of other mythical figures triggered a complex evolution of the personality of Paraśurāma. At the beginning of his mythical career, he is highlighted as a formidable warrior and hero, in the middle stage he is declared an avatāra. But at the end, he is being reduced to one of the many sages of Indian tradition. The growing emphasis on his status of sage was, in fact, the result of the weakening of his cult and the triumph of those brahmanical redactors who were very uncomfortable with his image of a kshatriya slayer and violator of *varṇa* norms. Therefore, a two-pronged strategy evolved over centuries; first his deeds, specially that of annihilation of Kārtavīrya and kshatriya were attributed to Viṣṇu himself. Later, deprived of his lustre he was made to surrender to Rāma and Gaṇeśa in a violent encounter or through the endorsement of Kṛṣṇa or Śiva as a greater divinity. Paraśurāma became a mere devotee of these supreme gods. Even the myths of

Dattātreya and Kalki incorporate him only as a mere sage and teacher of *śāstra* and *śastra.*

This study suggests that different sects and mythical figures tried to exert a kind of gravitational force on one another. It was closer to a system in which numerous terrestrial bodies try to pull others into its own sphere of influence or convert them into satellites, yet they are granted their autonomy and identity. Similarly, the destiny of Paraśurāma was decided by the gravitational pull of two mega stars of the Indian mythical galaxy, namely Viṣṇu and Śiva. However, so far as Paraśurāma's evolution as an avatāra is concerned, this was not mere subjugation; rather, it is an example of symbiosis, which helped both sides in some way.

Last, a question may be asked, whether we find an evidence of overlap of several personalities inside that of Paraśurāma, as has been argued in the case of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and many other mythical and cultic figures. The answer is in the negative—we do not have any indication to that effect, because there are no multi-dimensional, multi-faceted and contradictory images inside his personality, as we find in the case of other such deities. He has a monolithic and linear image, which works on predictable lines. But certainly his mythology went on developing and acquiring new achievements to his credit, which made him relevant in diverse times and spaces. The transition from annihilator of Kārtavīrya and kshatriyas to the creator of new lands and an avatāra to the portrayal as a mere sage indicate in that direction. Similarly, it is important to note that we don't have any myth, which could suggest that his cult tried to subjugate any other Puranic deity within its fold. Although the *Padma Purāṇa* mentions him as the conqueror of Skanda, there is no detailed myth described in this regard. Even *Keralamāhātmya* and *Keralotpatti* narrate the fight between the two ending at an equal level. Therefore, he could not acquire and share the achievements of other cult figures, except that of his father Jamadagni and mother Reṇukā. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that his expansion in south India was decisively influenced by the cult of Reṇukā, who in turn, appropriated the cult of many

local goddesses such as Yellammā, Ellammā, or Mariammā. In the Himalayas, there is some indication that the Paraśurāma cult tried to incorporate the Mahāsu cult within itself. But that had no significant impact on the expansion of the former.

In fact, the absence of myths related to the subjugation of other deities within Paraśurāma's fold is both the cause and effect of the weakening of his follower base, who were progressively integrated with the cult of Viṣṇu and Śiva. Therefore, appropriation of his cult by these two major streams of Indian religious beliefs reflects the process of transition of his support group to these larger cults. Although through his inclusion in the list of avatāras this cult gained a space in north India, his myth had limited scope for his transformation as a deity of *bhakti* cults, which became one of the major themes of medieval Hinduism. Yet his cult retained some pockets of influence, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters. Therefore, the history of the Paraśurāma cult is an exercise in reconstructing a dead and appropriated cult.

2. Paraśurāma as Avatāra

Paraśurāma's enumeration in the list of avatāras has been an enigma for the students of Viṣṇuism. It has remained one of the least researched subjects among the serious studies conducted on the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. There has been an ignorance as well as apathy towards the prevalence and popularity of this avatāra among the geographically and socially marginal people of this subcontinent. For instance, a recent study on Jaina Purāṇas suggests that "...some of the Hindu avatāras, which also incorporates heroes who are important on a mythic, universal historical, or conceptual level, such as Matsya, Kūrma, or Paraśurāma, ... are not necessarily popular cult figures."[89] There are many scholars, who have been so much influenced by V.S. Sukthankar's hypothesis on the Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata*[90] that they simply dismiss the deification of Paraśurāma as having any significant social support and attribute it to the "ulterior motives" of the Bhṛgu brahmanas, to use a phrase of Sukthankar's.[91] Thus, Suvira Jaiswal in her

excellent and extensive work on the origin and development of Vaiṣṇavism, spares just one paragraph to Paraśurāma in the entire book and says, "The apotheosis of Bhārgava Rāma, better known as Paraśurāma, was the work of the Bhṛgu brahmanas, the redactors of *Mahābhārata*, for, outside the Bhārgava circle he does not seem to have won much favour. His identification with Viṣṇu occurs only once in the *Mahābhārata* ... otherwise he appears simply as a great legendary hero who annihilated kshatriyas no less than twenty-one times."[92] Similarly, Parrinder says: "He comes in the later story, sometimes in conflict with the other Rāma avatāra. He seems to be little worshipped."[93] Gonda, in his classic study of Viṣṇuism doesn't even mention the Paraśurāma avatāra.

Interestingly, Dattātreya is given a different kind of evaluation, despite having a similar kind of brahmanical background and lineage of the Atri clan. Jaiswal says: "Dattātreya appears to have been another important incarnation of Viṣṇu mentioned in early lists."[94] In fact, there has been a tendency among scholars to accept all avatāras, including those in the form of fish and swan, even Dattātreya, Nārada, Kapila and Vyāsa as genuine and only exception was Paraśurāma. It seems his myth of kshatriya killing has been so explosive and uncomfortable for ancient redactors as well as modern historians that they tend to ignore him with some passing and disparaging remarks. One should not forget that all avatāras are constructions of brahmanas and their patrons, even Dāśarathī Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are no different. Though we do not intend to get involved in the larger debate around the doctrine of *avatāravāda* in Viṣṇuism, it will be difficult to proceed further without reviewing the processes of construction and expansion of incarnation lists to understand the situation in which Paraśurāma was given a place therein.

The Expansion of the List of Incarnations

There have been attempts to locate the seed of *avatāravāda* in the Vedic literature itself, but it seems that the complete and developed paraphernalia of *avatāravāda* appears only in the Purāṇas. In fact, the use of the word avatāra is also a late phenomenon. Such words

as *janman*, *sambhava*, *srjana* and *prādurbhāva* were earlier used to express the idea of incarnation.[95] However, the *Mahābhārata* presents both Vedic as well as epic features and perspectives on the phenomenon of avatāra. Therefore, the *Mahābhārata* and *Harivaṃśa* seem to be providing an intermediary phase of this development.[96]

As we know, Viṣṇu himself was the product of the amalgamation of various divinities of Vedic and non-Vedic origins, like Trivikrama, Vāmana and Nārāyaṇa.[97] The rise of Kṛṣṇa was also the result of a similar overlap and takeover of deities such as Vāsudeva, Saṃakarṣaṇa and Ekānaṃśā.[98] Therefore, incorporation and augmentation through imbrication of divinities are at the very root of the Vaiṣṇava pantheon. The mechanism of avatāra was just a continuation of the same process. In this context a very important evidence comes from a list given in the *Nārāyaṇīya* section of the *Mahābhārata* which contains only four avatāras and it helps one to understand the process of expansion of incarnation's lists. This enumeration mentions the names of only Varāha [Boar], Nṛsiṃha [Man-Lion], Vāmana [Dwarf] and Mānuṣa [Human, i.e. Kṛṣṇa].[99]

The first important basis for inclusion was selection of those deities or heroes who were already famous for destruction of an oppressive king or an enemy of gods and men. As a result, Paraśurāma and Rāma Dāśarathī were incorporated in the earliest phase. In fact the presence of Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana and later on Kalki and even Balarāma indicate the same direction. The deification of a hero was an integral part of this process.

Another role model was the Varahā [Boar] avatāra, who had been associated with the Viṣṇu cult from the very beginning[100] and therefore became an inspiration for the inclusion of other zoomorphic forms such as Matsya, Haṃsa, Kūrma and Hayagrīva, all of whom were symbols of a saviour at some critical mythical juncture. Similarly, Nṛsiṃha paved the way for another category of avatāras that symbolised the sudden appearance of the Lord to save his own devotee and resulted in the destruction of their enemy. The incarnations of Mohinī, Gajendra Mokṣadātā, Dhruvapriya, etc. fall in this segment. Finally, the fourth category emerged, which

constituted propounders of the different systems namely Buddha, Ṛṣabha, Nārada, Kapila, Dhanvantri, Dattātreya and Vyāsa. Along with this, Brahmā and Nara-Nārāyaṇa may also be included in the list. Significantly, all these avatāras were given a common denominator, which was the image of a saviour from social and natural calamities or predominance of *adharma*, as the *Mahābhārata* provides the classical line "*yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānirbhavati bhārata ...*" However, most of the philosophers coming from brahmanical lineage did not catch the fancy of the common people.

If one examines the evolution of incarnations in the *Mahābhārata*, its *Nārāyaṇiya* section provides three lists containing four [which has been mentioned above], six and ten divinities. The second list enumerates such incarnations, as the Boar, the Man-Lion, the Dwarf, Rāma of Bhṛgu race, Rāma Dāśarsathi, and the one who emerged for the destruction of Kaṃsa [Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa].[101] This passage is followed, after a short interval by another one, in which the incarnations are given as ten, the additions being Haṃsa [Swan], Matsya [Fish], Kūrma [Tortoise] in the beginning and Kalki at the end. The last but one is called *Sātvata*, i.e. Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa. This verse is now unanimously viewed as a later addition when the number of avatāras became fixed at ten.[102] Sukthankar held the view that the entire *Nārāyaṇīya* section is notoriously a late addition in the *Mahābhārata*.[103] However, Suvira Jaiswal has ascertained its date between second and fourth centuries CE.[104] It is interesting that the *Harivaṃśa* also mentions the six avatāras in the first of these two passages.[105]

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*[106] gives the incarnations in two passages. One of them has twelve incarnations and in the other these are fixed at ten. This list is made up by adding four additional avatāras to the six mentioned above, namely, Dattātreya, one unnamed called the fifth, Veda Vyāsa and Kalki. The *Liṅga Purāṇa* says: "The forms are conducive to the welfare of the world. They occur at every cycle of *Yugas*, viz. Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana, Rāma [Paraśurāma], Rāma [Dāśarathī] Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalki. There are other forms of Lord Viṣṇu due to the curse of Bhṛgu."[107] In the *Varāha Purāṇa* we have ten incarnations, which

came to be accepted later, including the Fish, Tortoise, Buddha and Kalki in addition to the six mentioned above. The *Agni Purāṇa* reiterates the list.[108]

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* enumerates the incarnations in three different passages. In the first, contained in Chapter Three of Book One, twenty-two avatāras are mentioned. Another passage in Chapter Seven of Book Two mentions twenty-three and in Chapter Four of Book Eleven, a list of sixteen avatāras is given. It deserves attention that among the avatāras mentioned in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are Sanat Kumar; the divine sage Nārada, who expounded the Sātvata system; Kapila, who explained the Sāṃkhya system to Āsuri, determining the collection of principles; Dattātreya, who is represented to have taught Ānvīkṣiki to Alarka and Prahlāda and the attainment of excellence by means of Yoga to Yadu and Haihayas; Ṛṣabha, the son of Nābhi and Meru Devi, who abandoned attachment to all things, acquired serenity and the art of looking at all things alike and possessing Yoga Power; Dhanvantri, the teacher of the science of medicine.

Interestingly, many of these new inclusions were from brahmanical lineage and all of them are somehow associated with the propagation of a particular kind of science or sectarian philosophy. Therefore, it is true that many of the redactors were trying to push various kinds of personalities among the list of avatāras, but that did not guarantee the perpetuation of their cult or the evolution of their sect. Inclusion of Ṛṣabha, perhaps the first Jaina tīrthaṃkara, was patterned after that of the Buddha.[109]

This expansion of the list is most manifestly present in the *Bhāgvata Purāṇa.* In fact, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* states, "Even as a perennial lake has canals by thousands, even so there are innumerable avatāras of Hari, the receptacle of goodness." [110] Therefore, this Purāṇa leaves scope for inclusion of innumerable incarnations in the list. But later, the concept of ten avatāras became a rigid one and although various other parallel lists exist, the *Daśāvatāra* became the most popular and widely accepted aspect of Viṣṇuism.

When was Paraśurāma included in the List of Avatāras?

Now the most important question from the point of view of this study is: when was Paraśurāma included in the list of incarnations? Charpentier says, "It is only in the very latest parts of the *Mahābhārata*, in the *Harivaṃśa*, and in certain Purāṇas that he figures in the various lists of the avatāras. The conclusion seems inevitable that at least in their present shape such passages must be younger than Kālidāsa who flourished during the fifth century CE. Consequently Paraśurāma did not become generally recognised as an avatāra until after that date".[111] Similarly, Irawati Karve also held that Paraśurāma is extolled as the incarnation of Viṣṇu only once in the *Mahābhārata*.[112]

It needs to be pointed out that although the fusion of different elements of Viṣṇu and other gods might have been going on in the post-Vedic period, Viṣṇu's association with other deities such as Rāma Dāśarathī and Kṛṣṇa also begins only in the epics. Whenever someone doubts the divine character of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata,* he exhibits his cosmic form, which also means that the idea of Kṛṣṇa being an avatāra was formed during the early redaction of the *Mahābhārata* and needed continuous reinforcement. Moreover, the epic view of avatāra is far less developed than the Purāṇaic view.[113] The *Mahābhārata* is, in a way, the point of the beginning of Vaiṣṇava *avatāravāda*. Therefore, Paraśurāma's inclusion in this list of the *Mahābhārata* cannot be seen as a symbol of late arrival; it is almost contemporaneous with the inclusion of the other two important deities, or at least Rāma Dāśarathī in the list of avatāras.

Suvira Jaiswal has argued that the deification of Paraśurāma took place between the second and the fourth centuries CE. But almost a similar chronology has been suggested by her for Dāśarathī Rāma too. She says, "Apparently by the end of the second century AD Rāma's identity with Viṣṇu had gained wide prevalence, and hence Buddhists ignored him. He appears as an incarnation of Viṣṇu in the first and last book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which are generally regarded as later additions made presumably in the second century A.D. but in the original epic he is depicted simply as an ideal hero.... In our opinion, there is nothing to show

that Rāma Dāśarathī was adored as an incarnation of Viṣṇu several centuries before the birth of Christ, But he was certainly worshipped as such in the Gupta period."[114]

Therefore, it is very important to emphasise that Paraśurāma was not a very late addition, because his name exists in all lists of avatāras in the *Mahābhārata* except the one containing four incarnations. He also figures in almost all Puranic lists of avatāras which give a special place to him in Viṣṇuism. His apotheosis cannot be simply brushed aside as a work of Bhṛguid brahmanas. As far as literary sources are concerned, Paraśurāma was part of the list of avatāras from its initial phase of expansion. Moreover, the late inclusion theory could be argued only if the list pre-existed and later he was pushed into the category, as has been is found in the case of many other brahmana sages in the expanded list of avatāras.

Why was Paraśurāma included in the lists of avatāras?

The answer to this question has been more elusive and a large section of modern scholarship has been influenced by Sukthankar's theory. This notion is partly held because of the ignorance regarding the Paraśurāma cult, as stated earlier. This has also been partly due to the overemphasis on subjective factors in the making of cults. The role of planning and consciousness in cult formation may be very limited in its scope. However, the Bhṛgus as a group had an important role in the evolution of the concept of avatāra. There are repeated references to such accounts in several Purāṇas.[115] According to these accounts, Viṣṇu took the form of an avatāra due to the curse of Bhṛgu. The *Padma Purāṇa,* in one of its sections related to consecration of Indra, tells us about Vāsudeva himself saying to Aditi: "Then I shall surely remain in your womb. O goddess, when the twelfth *yuga* comes, I shall, for removing the burden of the earth....and for killing all the kshatriyas, be [born as] ... [Paraśu] Rāma Jamadagni's son, the best of brahmanas and endowed with valour and lustre, and best among all those who wield weapons.[116] Similarly, the *Liṅga Purāṇa* says: "His [Viṣṇu] forms are many due to the curse of Bhṛgu."[117]

In some other accounts Lakṣmī is said to be the daughter of Bhṛgu. Therefore, as far as mythical narratives are concerned, either the Bhṛgus had an important role in formation and propagation of *avatāravāda* in Viṣṇuism or they were trying to project their importance through the construction of such myths at a later date. Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that even if a group of brahmanas float a cult through conscious design, it will remain dormant without participants and followers. Therefore, even if Paraśurāma was made into a god and declared to be an avatāra in a motivated attempt, the perpetuation and expansion of his myths cannot be guaranteed by a group of redactors alone.

It should be underlined that in his earlier and Vedic form, Viṣṇu appears to save gods and earth and destroys the enemies of the gods. In his later forms, his incarnations establish *dharma* in every *yuga* and contains a cultic form. So in Viṣṇuism an emphasis on the purpose of the incarnation of god to destroy the wicked and protect the righteous one is clearly asserted,[118] which had an important bearing on the inclusion of several avatāras, including Paraśurāma and Rāma Dāśarathī. The human avatāras assist the purpose of deliverance from demonic oppression.[119] Charpentier has also suggested, "May be he [Paraśurāma] was already at an early date looked upon locally as an avatāra, and perhaps this idea spread from Konkan towards the South and East – for although not unknown in the North his fame seems to be less great in that direction."[120] Paraśurāma must have been included in this list due to his cult's having a sizeable followers in some parts of the subcontinent as is shown in the subsequent chapter. If this had not been so there would be Bhṛgu himself or any other strong personality of his mythical clan like Chyavana and Śukra to be pushed by the Bhṛguid redactors, even if we accept the bhṛguisation theory.

Moreover, before the Viṣṇu cult became an overarching pantheon, its constituent individual cults might have existed in an equally nebulous state for a very long time. It is a different matter that some cults may have developed more than others due to their internal structure and appeal among the common people. But at a

particular point of time, while in the embryonic stage, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Nārāyaṇa, and Viṣṇu cults might have existed on a similar plane and they might have had a similar kind of stature, i.e. a very small, emerging cultic tradition trying to gain ground among the people. Only once these cults crystallised and gathered some followers did the integration, consolidation and expansion processes take place. Hence consolidation of *avatāravāda* must have followed after the crystallisation of individual deities.

Anyhow, teleological discourse does not help the pursuit of historical reconstruction. Once a phenomenon has taken place, it is simplistic to see it predetermined, because it rules out various other possibilities of growth or decay existing side by side. The conspiracy theory heavily draws upon the notion that Viṣṇuism was born to be a triumphant religious order. One should visualise a time when Brahmanism was competing with Buddhism, Jainism and many other religious sects for survival and was desperately trying to retain a place for itself. One should look into an epoch when the grand alliance of all brahmanical sects had not emerged and most of them were collaborating and competing with each other at the same time. No one knew which sect would survive and which one would die. Rather, they were not concerned with such questions at all. If we try to visualise the transition from the post-Vedic to the post-Mauryan and Gupta period, the crucial phase for the rise of Viṣṇuism might have been between the 3rd century BCE to CE 3rd century. By the 3rd century BCE Buddhism had gathered enormous influence and remained strong throughout that period. Within Brahmanism a transition from the Vedic sacrificial cult to new deity-centred cults was taking place. Therefore, we find that in this period, the cults of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma were still making efforts for their development, coexisting with numerous small and local cults. At that time they were not present as dominant deities as we find them in the Gupta period.

Fabrication of mega cult figures must have been a long drawn out social process, therefore, it should be seen as an objective phenomenon rather than a subjective design of a few individuals.

When Nārāyaṇa, Vāmana and Viṣṇu were merged into one personality, it could not be thought to be the precursor of a major personality who will take over many other cults through the institution of avatāra. Just like small tribes merged with others to form larger identities, small territorial units unified through force or willingness to create bigger political units, mergers of small cults first among themselves and then through 'imperial acquisitions' by mega cult figures, such as Viṣṇu and Śiva, were part of general cultural processes.

To think that the Bhṛgus could visualise centuries in advance that Viṣṇuism would emerge as a dominant and overarching stream of Indian religion and, therefore, think that declaring Paraśurāma as avatāra of Viṣṇu would be beneficial for them, is really attributing divinity to them. One should try to understand how Viṣṇuism became popular through the process of integration of various kinds of cults and mythical personalities within its fold.

If brahmanas created cults and deities at their will, and if such things depended on their whims and fancies, then Brahmā could have been the supreme deity or at least he could not have been denigrated as a god who often releases semen at the first sight of a beautiful nymph or goddess. Then Rāma or Kṛṣṇa could not have been supreme deities despite having been portrayed as kshatriyas. Then numerous tribal gods and goddesses could not have entered their pantheon. Perhaps brahmanas were mainly interested in presiding over ritual and through this effect domination over the cult. They did not bother about the nature of the deity; it was secondary for them.

Therefore, it seems Paraśurāma was included among avatāras because of three reasons. First of all, it contained a myth of annihilation of an oppressive king, just as some other avatāras. Second, it already had a cultic structure and a substantial number of followers ready to believe in his divinity. And finally, his inclusion in the list of avatāras, must have facilitated the growth of Viṣṇuism in some parts of the Indian subcontinent.

Table 6: Paraśurāma vis-á-vis other deities: Myths of hegemony

Deities	Device	Myths
Śiva	• Proclamining Paraśurāma to be a *Śiva-bhakta*	1. **The Siva-Tripura myth** Karṇaparva, *Mahābhārata* CE 8. 24.131–160
	• Śiva's weapons made Paraśurāma victorious	2. **Upamanyu's description of *Śiva-loka*** Anuśāsanaparva, *Mahābhārata* CE 13.14.137–140; *Śiva Purāṇa, Umā Saṃhitā* 1.18.27
		3. **Paraśurāma's visit to Śivaloka** *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3. 21–32; *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III. 24–46
		4. **Myth of Demon-slaying** *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 1.49.22–28
Gaṇeśa	• Defeat of Paraśurāma at the hands of Gaṇeśa	1. **Myth of Encounter at Śivaloka** *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* III.41–46; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3.41.34–42
Kārttikeya	• Friendship and Rivalry	1. **Myth of founding new cities and shrines** *Keralamāhātmya*, I. p.22; *Padma Purāṇa*, VI.7.199-212
Pārvati	• Dislikes Paraśurāma's closeness to Śiva	1. **Ekadanta myth,** *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III.43.15–34; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.42.7–17
		2. **Myth of Curse** *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* III.44.20.27
Kālī	Eulogy of Kālī by Paraśurāma	1. **Kālī's boon myth,** *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3.39.30–53; *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III.37.1–24
Rādhā	Boon to Paraśurāma	1. **Rādhā's boon myth,** *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III. 30.10–20 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.39.30–53
Kṛṣṇa–Balarāma	Mutual respect and endorsement	1. **Myth of endorsement,** *Mahābhārata*, CE 5.123.16; *Mahābhārata*, CE 5.94–96; *Mahābhārata*, CE 8.28.61; *Bhagavadgītā*, 10.31; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X.5.18–30 X.79.11–12 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3.33–43
Viṣṇu	• Avatāra • *Bhakta*	1. **Avatāra myth,** *Mahābhārata* 12.337.36; *Vāyu Purāṇa* 97.72; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.26;
		2. **Śaṅkara Gīta** *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* 1.49.29–45

Deities	Device	Myths
Dāśarathī	Rāma Defeat of Paraśurāma	1. **Myth of defeat after Sītā *swayamvara*** *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa* 75–76 *Mahābhārata*, B.3.99.34 *Agni Purāṇa* 5.13–14 *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV.IV.43
Kalki	Paraśurāma as *guru* of Kalki	1. **Myth of *guru* of Kalki,** *Kalki Purāṇa* 3.1–12
Dattātreya	Paraśurāma as desciple of Dattātreya	*Datta Purāṇa* IV.8

Footnotes

1 *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 8. 24. 131–160 G.P. 8. 34. 129–160, pp. 3861–63.

2 *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 13. 14. 137-140 G.P. 13. 14. 271–274 p. 5497.

3 *Śiva Purāṇa, Uma Saṃhitā*. 1. 18–27.

4 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 21. 74–84.

5 Ibid. 2.3. 23.51.

6 Ibid. 2.3.23.61–63.

7 Ibid. 2.3. 23. 72–74.

8 Ibid.2.3.31.12.

9 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3. 23. 65–69.

10 *Śiva Purāṇa, Rudra Saṃhita, Kumāra Khaṇḍa*, IV. 9. 23.

11 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 23. 64.

12 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 24. 33–45; supra pp. 2–3.

13 Ibid. 2.3.24.72.

14 Ibid. 2.3.24.75–81.

15 Ibid. 2.3.24.78.

16 Ibid. 2.3. 31. 36–37.

17 Ibid. 2.3. 32.35.

18 Ibid.2.3. 32. 41–68.

19 *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa, Gaṇeśakhaṇḍa* III. 24–46.

20 *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* I.36.23–28.

21 *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, I.49.22–28.

22 D.D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, p.3.

23 *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa, Gaṇeśakhaṇḍa*, ch 41–46.

[24] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.41.34–42.6.

[25] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, *Gaṇeśakhaṇḍa* 46. 1.

[26] D.D.Kosambi, op.cit, p. 110.

[27] *Śiva Purāṇa*, *Rudra Saṃhitā*, Kumāra Khaṇḍa IV. 9. 23.

[28] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.41. 53.

[29] Ibid. 2.3.32.54.

[30] *Keralamāhātmya*, mss. 2392, New Catalogues Catalagorum, I.p.22.

[31] Kumari S.S. Janaki, "Paraśurāma", *Purāṇa*, 1966 p.66.

[32] Ibid. pp.63–64.

[33] Kṣemendra, *Daśāvatāracarita*, p. 44, *Pratāparudriya*, *Kāvyaprakaraṇa*, śl.49 and the commentary Ratnāpaṇa thereon. *Rasārṇavasudhākara*, pp.12-13,16; *Bālarāmāyaṇa* IV. śl. 17. 27. In the unpublished *Gadyakarṇāmṛta* [ms.2837 Oriental Research Institute, Mysore], a historical prose work, the author Vidyachakravartin conceives the rival Hoyśāḷa and Pāṇḍya kings as Subrahamaṇya and Paraśurāma respectively, cf. Kumari S.S. Janaki, op.cit. p. 67.

[34] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI. 7. 199–212.

[35] C.Achuta Menon ed. *Keralotpatti*, pp. 61–63, 71 cf. Kumari S.S. Janaki, op. cit. pp. 67–68.

[36] Geoffery Parrinder, *Avatāra and Incarnation*, p. 26; Suvira Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*, p. 125.

[37] Lynn Thomas, "Paraśurāma and Time", in Julia Leslie, ed. *Myth and Mythmaking*, pp.63–86.

[38] *Mahābhārata*, B. 3.99.34; G.P. 3. 99. 39–71, p.1237.

[39] V.S. Sukthankar, 'Epic Studies VI', *ABORI*, XVIII, 1936. p.21.

[40] J.L. Brockington, *The Righteous Rāma*, pp. 231, 315.

[41] Adalbert Gail, *Paraśurāma Brahmane und Krieger*, p.222.

[42] *Agni Purāṇa*, 5. 13–14.

[43] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV.IV. 43. P. 548, tr.H.H. Wilson.

[44] *Padma Purāṇa* VI. 242.154–180.

[45] *Padma Purāṇa* VI. 254. 30–47.

[46] *Narasimha Purāṇa*, 47. 138–154.

[47] *Rāmāyaṇa, Bālakāṇḍa*, sarga, 7576; I. p.171–74.

[48] *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa*, 9.24.

[49] For example, during our visit to the Areraj temple complex, East Champaran, Bihar, in March 2001, we noticed that a Paraśurāma temple had been converted into a temple of Sri Rāma, Sitā and Lakṣmaṇa and Paraśurāma's

statue has been left behind in the background niche completely unnoticed by visitors.

[50] Premakanta Mahanta, *Karbi Rāmāyaṇa*, Chhabin Alum : Prakas, IX, No.1 Oct. 1983, cf. Parampanthi, op.cit. p. 43–44.

[51] Arudra, *Sita Rāma Ki Kya Lagati Hai?*, p.11.

[52] *Bhattikāvya*, II. 52, cf. Parampanthi, op.cit., p. 34.

[53] S. Jena, *Narasiṃha Purāṇa*: A Study. p. 321.

[54] *Mahābhārata*, C.E.5. 123. 16 G.P. 5. 125. 16 p. 2378.

[55] Ibid. C.E. 5. 94-96; G.P. 5. 96, pp 2323–27.

[56] Ibid. C.E. 5. 123. 16; G.P. 5.125. 16 p. 2378.

[57] Ibid. C.E. 8. 28. 61, G.P. 8. 41. 78. pp.3886.

[58] Ibid. C.E. expunged; G.P. 3. 12. 51 p. 983.

[59] Ibid C.E. 12 326. 77 G.P. 12. 339. 84 pp. 5351.

[60] *Bhagavadgītā*, 10. 31. G.P. 2704.

[61] V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit. p. 39; G.V.Ketkar "Gitā's Rāma is Paraśurāma", *Hindu Viswa*, 7, no. 9, May, 1982.

[62] *Mahābhārata*, G.P. p. 792, Southern recension after 2. 35. 29.

[63] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X. 53. 18–30.

[64] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* X. 79. 11–12.

[65] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3. 33. 3.

[66] Ibid. 2.3. 42 and 43.

[67] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III.45.1–4.

[68] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, II. 7.4.

[69] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, I.3.11; IV. 1. 33 *Garuḍa Purāṇa* I. 226.2; III. 15.13.

[70] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, II. 7. 4, IV. 1. 15; *Brahma Purāṇa*, 104. 95–105; 180.31; 213.106; *Agni Purāṇa* 20.12; 49. 27; *Matsya Purāṇa* 47.242, 99.14 *Mahābhārata*, Southern rescension 2.35. 29.

[71] *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.1.19 *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3.11.

[72] Antonio Rigopolus, *Dattātreya : The immortal Guru, Yogin and Avatāra* p. 42.

[73] *Datta Purāṇa* IV. 8 cf. Kumari S.S Janaki, op.cit. p. 73.

[74] *Datta Purāṇa* IV. 32.

[75] *Kalki Purāṇa*, 2. 42.

[76] Ibid. 3. 26.

[77] Ibid. 2.25.

[78] Ibid. 3. 1–12.

[79] Ibid. 16. 48-52; 17. 1–44.

[80] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* I. IX. 140–143, Tr. H.H. Wilson pp.115–116.

[81] *Skanda Purāṇa*, III.i.22.18.ii.

[82] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3. 32. 49–52.

[83] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, *Gaṇeśakhaṇḍa*, 43. 15–34.

[84] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.3.42. 7–17.

[85] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*. III.30.10–20.

[86] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa* III.44.20–27[emphasis added].

[87] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.39. 30–53.

[88] *Brahmavaivartta Purāṇa*, III.37.1–24.

[89] John E. Cort, "An Overview of the Jaina Purāṇas" in Wendy Doniger ed. *Purāṇa Perennis*, p. 201.

[90] V.S. Sukthankar, 'Epic Studies VI', *ABORI*, Vol. XVIII, October, 1936, Part I.

[91] Ibid. pp.67.

[92] Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit., p. 120.

[93] Geoffrey Parrinder, op.cit., p.26.

[94] Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit., p. 130, although some of the scholars believe him to be a late entrant in the avatāra list. cf. Hopkins, *Epic Mythology*, 184; Jarl Charpentier, "Paraśu-Rāma", *Kuppuswami Shastri Commemoration Volume*, 1937 p.10 fn.

[95] Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit. pp. 119–120.

[96] V.S. Sukthankar, op.cit., p. 48; Kapildeo Pandey, *Madhya Kālin Sahitya men Avatārvada*, pp. 24–25.

[97] Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit. pp.32–50.

[98] Ibid. pp. 61–88.

[99] *Mahābhārata*, 12. 337. 36; Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit. p. 120.

[100] J.Gonda, *Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism*, pp.129–144.

[101] *Mahābhārata*, 12. 326. 72 f.

[102] R.G.Bhandarkar, "*Vaiṣṇavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*", in Nārāyaṇa Bapuji Utgikar ed. *Collected works of Śri R.G. Bhandarkar*, IV, p. 58; Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit. p. 120.

[103] V.S.Sukthankar, op.cit., p. 48.

[104] Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit., pp. 15–16.

[105] R.G.Bhandarkar, op.cit., p. 59.

[106] *Vāyu Purāṇa*, 97. 72; 98. 63.

[107] *Liṅga Purāṇa* II. 48. 31–32.

[108] R.G.Bhandarkar, op.cit., p. 59.

[109] Ibid. p.59.

[110] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.3. 26.

[111] Jarl Charpentier, op.cit. p. 14.

[112] Iravati Karve, "The Paraśurāma Myth", *JUB*, 1932-33, p. 128.

[113] Nicholas Sutton, *Religious Doctrines in the Mahābhārata*, p.156.

[114] Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit. pp. 124–128.

[115] *Brāhmaṇḍa Purāṇa* 1.2.27.22–23, 2.3.72.62–149; *Kūrma Purāṇa* 1. 23. 72; *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1. 29. 25–29, 1. 69. 48, 2. 48. 30–32, *Matsya Purāṇa* 47. 88–113; *Padma Purāṇa* 5. 2. 13, 5. 4. 89–113, 5. 13. 175–256, *Śiva Purāṇa* 7. 2. 31. 129; *Skanda Purāṇa* 7. 2. 17. 3–4.

[116] *Padma Purāṇa* II. 5. 60–65.

[117] *Liṅga Purāṇa*, 48.30–32.

[118] S.L. Katre, "On the purpose of an Avatāra", *AUS*, X, p. 48, cited in Suvira Jaiswal, op.cit. p. 119.

[119] Geoffrey Parrinder, op.cit. pp. 24–25.

[120] Jarl Charpentier, op.cit. p. 14.

Chapter 5

Creation of the Sacred Space

Sacred space is primarily the spatial embodiment of a system of religious belief, which not only mediates between myth and ritual but amongst various other material and spiritual paraphernalia of a cultic complex. It is an intersection where various streams of a cultic systems converge, as symbolised by river crossings and crossroads,[1] which developed as the earliest variety of *tīrthas*. Some scholars have seen *tīrthas* as a crossing place which brings all elements of the world together in a 'symbolic microcosm' and enhances the pilgrim's experience of the sacred.[2] But even if one does not present it as a microcosm of the world, it certainly represents the essence of a system of religious belief. However, the creation of a sacred space has been a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which has various objectives and agenda. In recent years many insightful contributions have been made in the history of sacred geography, which has underlined the processes of de-urbanisation, expansion of agriculture, gift exchange, land grants, acculturation, state formation and various aspects of cultic practices through the institution of *tīrtha*.[3]

The notion of *tīrtha* transforms from the Vedic to Puranic literature. While the Vedas and the Dharmaśāstras attached sanctity to regions, mountains or rivers in general, the Purāṇas gradually broadened the parameters related to definition of the sacred space,

which resulted in the phenomenal increase in the number of *tīrthas* enumerated in the Puranic lists. But a more important new development was the rise of temple–centric *tīrthas*, particularly in the peripheral areas.[4] Therefore, at least theoretically it can be argued that some of the *kṣetras* and *kuṇḍas* associated with Paraśurāma might have existed earlier and preceded the construction of his temples. For example, the association of Rāmahṛda in Kurukṣetra or Brahmakuṇḍa in Arunachal Pradesh with Paraśurāma, or for that matter land creation myths specially that of Konkan, might have greater antiquity, than most of his temples. Familiarity of Kālidāsa with the myth of Brahmakuṇḍa and Konkana may be cited as a case in point.[5] But these facts are difficult to be ascertained through archaeological sources. Since each and every section of the *Mahābhārata* or Purāṇas cannot be dated with precision, it becomes difficult to assert that in the first phase most of the Paraśurāma *tīrthas* were non-architectural in nature, incorporating only/mostly geographical regions and water bodies.

There is a problem in studying such *tīrthas* that have not yielded any architectural or other archaeological remains. Apart from that, there has been an obvious emphasis in Indian archaeology on the mega cults, enjoying various kinds of patronage from the state and rich merchants. Small cults and the religious universe of the marginal people have been somewhat neglected. If one observes religions from below, it seems that in the religious world of the common man, a local *devasthāna* in the vicinity of the village might have been more significant, which may not have contained any durable architecture, compared to huge temple complexes created by royal families. The importance of the *brahmasthāna* on the outskirts of the village and shrines of Śitalā, Yellammā and various mother goddesses in the life of rural folk may not be difficult to appreciate. The big temples might have been open for ordinary people only a couple of times a year on special occasions and festivals. Due to great distances and the diffused nature of settlements, not everyone could have visited big temple complexes daily.[6]

It is quite possible that many marginal communities continued with their age old non-architectural sacred spaces right up to the modern period. Alternatively, whenever a community gained access to political power or resources, their non-architectural shrines were converted into some kind of temple and only did then they get noticed by historians. Architecture reveals the history of resource investment in a particular cult by a particular community at a certain point of time and not the history of the cult in totality. Many *tīrthas* associated with *piṇḍadāna* and *śrāddha* rituals, for example, may not have incorporated monumental structures for a long time. Hence, as far as temple construction is concerned, it may not be simply a question of transition from Vedic to Puranic religions in terms of the rise of new cults; rather, it also involved the question of social patronage and nature of the *tīrthas* themselves. Even in the period between the 12th and 16th centuries, when temple construction was undertaken on a large scale, many *tīrthas* may have continued in the non-architectural space, just like they did in the Vedic period. This has an important bearing on our reconstruction because archaeological remains of the *tīrthas* and *kṣetras* of Paraśurāma, Reṇukā and Jamadagni are very few, while undatable anthropological data provide ample insights into the development of their cults. Although one cannot treat anthropological evidences on a par with the historical records in the exercise of history writing, it is necessary for us to remain sensitive towards this aspect of the history of religion. Perhaps there is need for archaeologists to come out of big temple complexes and pay some attention to smaller shrines, tree grooves, mountain peaks, lakesides and other sacred spots, in order to move towards a people-oriented archaeology of religion. One is aware of the hardship of these paths but there is no alternative than developing compatible conceptual tools for reconstructing religion, specially that of the lower order. In this context, our understanding of *kṣetras* associated with Paraśurāma becomes very significant.

1. The Myth of Kṣetra: The Land Reclamation Myth

Sanctification of an entire region has been an important form of

creation of a sacred space around the personality of a mythical figure. There are several examples of such *puṇyakṣetras* in Puranic literature. In this context it is noteworthy that while the Agastya legend is confined to the eastern coast of South India, the Paraśurāma tradition constitutes the most important component of the narrative related to the sacred geography popular on the western coast. The myth of *kṣetra* developed around the personality of Paraśurāma has two important features. First, it is strictly associated with south-western India as one does not find any Paraśurāma *kṣetra* in the Ganga valley or in any other region north of the Vindhyas. On the other hand, many regions are enumerated as Paraśurāma *kṣetras* in southern and western India. It may be noted that land creation became the most important part of the Paraśurāma narrative in the southern tradition and overshadowed the Kārtavīrya and kshatriya killing myths to a great extent. Second, most of the *mahāpurāṇas* do not mention the land reclamation myth of Konkan or Malabar in any significant detail. Only regional texts of late origin give importance to this legend.

It is also important to note that while the *Mahābhārata* refers to some of the myths associated with *tīrthas* of Paraśurāma, it does not mention his legend of land reclamation on the western coast in any notable detail.[7] The Akṛtavraṇa version does not talk about the creation of land or any encounter with Varuṇa, the sea god. It simply says that after donating the entire earth to Kaśyapa, Paraśurāma retired to Mount Mahendra. It is only in the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version that some hints of this myth of land creation may be located. Although it tries to minimise the role of Paraśurāma in the reclamation of land and says that after performing *aśvamedha yajña* Paraśurāma donated the entire earth to Kaśyapa, who wanted to save some of the kshatriyas in order to establish law and order on the earth. Therefore, he asked Paraśurāma to immediately leave the territory donated to him and ordered him never to step in it. He indicated in the direction of the western sea coast through his *śruvā* and suddenly the sea vacated a new land for Paraśurāma which was called Aparānta [see Chapter 2]. As we have argued earlier, perhaps this myth was used by the Kāśyapas to enhance

their own position and they tried to share along with Paraśurāma the credit of creating new land. In the south Indian tradition, not only is the enhanced position of Kaśyapa missing, Paraśurāma is also given a more valorous image and it is depicted as Paraśurāma's victory over the sea god and not as a mercy bestowed upon him. Otherwise also, the creation of Śūrpāraka has been more closely associated with the Bhṛgu tradition than that of the Kāśyapas.[8] Therefore, only the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version shows familiarity with this land creation myth.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* which otherwise provides a detailed account of the Paraśurāma myth, does not mention the land reclamation myth. Following the Akṛtavraṇa version, it simply says that even today Paraśurāma resides on the Mahendra mountain.[9] As already noted, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is closer to Akṛtavraṇa than the Śrī Kṛṣṇa version, which offers a possibility that Śrī Kṛṣṇa version as well as the land creation myth may be later than the composition of this portion of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* Otherwise, there is no reason why this great achievement of this *avatāra* would not be mentioned in this text, which enhances his appeal manifold. The *Brahma Purāṇa* also incorporates an almost similar narrative and says that after donating the entire earth and huge amounts of gifts, Paraśurāma went to live on Mount Mahendra, where he stays even today.[10] The *Padma Purāṇa* relates that he went to the hermitage of Nara-Nārāyaṇa after donating all seven islands to brahmans.[11] It is remarkable that none of the other Purāṇas, such as *Vāyu, Matsya, Viṣṇu* mention the land creation myth which is so popular in the southern tradition. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* narrates that Paraśurāma went to the netherworld to kill demons at the order of Śiva and after killing them bowed and prayed to Varuṇa and received various kind of wisdom. There is no reference to the land creation myth, which could be explained by the north Indian origin of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.*

However, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* devotes substantial space to the land creation myth, which has been recounted in the introduction.[12] The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* version has many differences as well as some similarities with other popular and

oral traditions of south India. In all probability, this is an example of the back and forth movement of myths between the folk and Sanskritic tradition, to use Wendy Doniger's terminology[13], and this throws significant light on the process of Purāṇa composition. This myth of land reclamation is closely associated with the narratives of Sagara. The Sagara episode in turn, is closely connected with the annihilation of the Haihayas.

Almost a similar albeit smaller version occurs in the *Nārada Purāṇa*,[14] but the tone and temperament of the narrative is the same. It is related as a narrative pertaining to the glory of the Gōkarṇa *tīrtha*. The *Nārada Purāṇa* is said to be a later text than the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, as it contains the subject index of the later. Therefore only two of the Purāṇas present this myth of Paraśurāma and Gōkarṇa *tīrtha*, ascribing some importance to it.

The myth of land reclamation gets an important place in the early medieval texts of the western coast. As far as local legend and traditions prevalent in Konkan, Tuluva and Kerala are concerned, all of them mention the reclamation of the land submerged under seawater. The depiction of Paraśurāma in these *māhātmyas* is of titanic magnitude and he is considered not only the creator of the land but responsible for the social customs and the kind of life prevalent there.[15]

The *Keralamāhātmya* is one of the most significant texts in this regard which has a close relationship with the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*.[16] It discusses the origin of Kerala in its fourth chapter and says that after the donation of the earth as an expiation for his sins of matricide and kshatriya slaughter, Paraśurāma learnt from the sage that he has no place in the land gifted by him. Paraśurāma then went to Kailāsa and appealed to Śiva for help. The lord asked Paraśurāma to request the ocean for a piece of land to help him in this matter and sent Subrahmaṇya with a promise that all the divinities, including himself, will be present in the new land. Paraśurāma and Subrahmaṇya proceeded southward. There Subrahmaṇya created Kumari and asked Paraśurāma to worship her for a year. Paraśurāma did accordingly and Varuṇa appeared before them at the end of the year. Paraśurāma requested Varuṇa

for some living space and Subrahmaṇya also interceded on behalf of his friend. At the behest of Varuṇa, Paraśurāma hurled his axe from the place where he stood and the axe descended at Gōkarṇa. To make the new land cultivable, Paraśurāma started digging the earth with his axe. Then the Earth appealed to Brahmā for help, Brahmā called forth Varuṇa and ordered him to give plentiful showers to the newly formed country. After that the text describes how Paraśurāma brought learned brahmans from the Krishna, the Godavari and Madhura region, created sixty-four settlements for them and introduced many social customs for the people of that area. He is said to have established many new temples. The *Kerala Māhātmya* provides many other south Indian traditions related to Paraśurāma. These are supposed to be part of *Paraśurāmāyaṇa*.[17] *Keralotpatti*, a Malyalam text, also follows the same pattern. There are certain similarities between *Grāmapaddhati* and *Keralotapattī*, because both of them invoke the Paraśurāma tradition of land creation and establishment of brahmanic settlement.

There are some other texts that are part of the Mackenzie manuscripts composed in Tamil, Telugu and Marathi, which deal with Paraśurāma's influence on the people of the coastal area. For example, *Sagarakathā* starts with the inundation caused on the earth by the Ganga when she was brought down to the mortal world by Bhāgīratha. This narrative also has similarities with that of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* described above and refers to reclaimed land measuring 200 *yojanas* from north to south. Similarly, *Mūṣakavaṃśa* also relates the story of the Mūṣaka kingdom incorporating the Paraśurāma tradition.[18]

Many local Purāṇas and *Sthala Māhātmyas* like *Grāmapaddhati*, *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa*, [Sanskrit and Kannada versions], *Gokarṇa Māhātme*, *Velāpura Māhātme*, *Viśvadarśana* and *Keralotpatti* use the motif of land reclamation by Paraśurāma. The *Grāmapaddhati* is an important text in this regard, which recounts Paraśurāma's connection with the Tulu country. It is supposed to be a part of the *Sahayādri Khaṇḍa*, which in turn, is claimed to be part of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, but it has largely maintained its independent existence. The *Grāmapaddhati* not only

has different versions which date from different periods but within the text too, there are many additions which come from varying periods.[19]

This text is broadly divided into three parts. The first part deals with mythology such as the creation of land and its early settlement, conversion of local fishermen into brahmans by Paraśurāma as well as the role of Śiva in the origin of kingship and state in this region. The second part gives the details of the rule of kings, protests and rebellion and invitation to outside brahmans by Mayura Varman. The third part refers to the settlement of brahmans in thirty-two *grāmas*. The narrative says that after slaying the kshatriyas twenty-one times, Paraśurāma gave away the entire land to Kaśyapa as the fee for the sacrifice performed to expiate for the sin. Kaśyapa told Paraśurāma that it is wrong to live in the land donated by him to others. So Paraśurāma came to the Sahya hills and wrested fresh land from the western sea. In the newly created land there was no brahman population and brahmans from outside were not ready to go there, as it was a *abrahmaneya desa* [land without brahman]. So he converted Kaivarttas into brahmans and assured them great prosperity.[20] This version shows that Paraśurāma created land for himself first, unlike the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, where he reclaimed land for other sages.

The *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa*, claiming to be a part of the *Skanda Purāṇa* is also intimately connected with the *Grāmapaddhati*. The Sanskrit and Kannada versions of the text are somewhat dissimilar.[21] However, as both show familiarity with the tradition of Madhva, they could be dated after the early years of the 13th century CE.[22] It focuses on giving the list of *tīrtha kṣetras* and narrating the *Sthala Purāṇa*. The *Reṇukā Māhātmya*, which is closely related to the Paraśurāma legend, is also part of this Sanskrit text.

The creation of land is repeated many times in this text, which gives two versions. One suggests that after donating land to Kaśyapa, Nārada advised Paraśurāma to create a piece of land for himself by using his arrow to drive away the sea. He stood on top of Sahyādri and asked *Samudra* to send all animals to the eastern sea so that their lives would be protected from his arrow. On the

land thus created, Paraśurāma first established two villages and another five later. These came to be known as *Rāmakṣetra* and Paraśurāma started living there. This place was later divided into Kerala, Tulaṅga, Saurāṣṭra, Konkan, Karhāta, Karṇāta and Barbara and these divisions came to be known as *Sapta Konkan*.[23] However, B.A. Saletore held the view that the mythological denomination of *Sapta Konkan* seems to be both arbitrary as well as a historical.[24]

In the seventh chapter this myth is narrated again but with certain variations. This time Paraśurāma hurls the axe and not an arrow. He throws his axe at the suggestion of the sea-god himself and as a result, the sea recedes. He converted some fishermen into brahmans and went to Gōkarṇa to see Mahābala/Śiva. After that the story of Mayura Varman is narrated.[25] This account also incorporates the narrative of the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya conflict.

The Origin and Development of the Land Reclamation Myth

The date of origin and development of this myth poses a difficult problem. As we have noted earlier, *Mahābhārata* and most of the Purāṇas have overlooked the myth of land creation. But significantly, Kālidāsa mentions this myth very clearly. While describing the conquest of Raghu he says, "The sea though pushed afar by the missiles of Paraśurāma, appeared as if touching the mountain Sahya on account of his extensive army ... Being pressed, it is said, the ocean gave space to Paraśurāma; to Raghu he paid tribute under the guise of the princes of the western coast."[26] It is quite clear that by the 5th century CE this myth about the creation of Konkana was fairly known.

It is significant to question why none of the early and most of the later Purāṇas,[27] that otherwise give a lot of details about the deeds of Paraśurāma, do not mention this myth. Suddenly, in the early medieval period the myth acquires the status of an important narrative in the texts of the western coast and in some of the Purāṇas. Moreover, while some early inscriptions describe Paraśurāma as a great warrior,[28] his land reclamation myth is indicated perhaps for the first time in a Cōḷa inscription of the

11th century. The earliest inscriptional evidence of Kerala being Paraśurāma *kṣetra* comes in the Tiruvālaṅgāḍu plates of Rājendra I [CE 1018].[29] Therefore, except Kālidāsa and one vague reference in the *Mahābhārata,* most of the sources suggest the late popularisation of this myth. Possibly, this myth existed from very early times, but its use became widespread only under the influence of the land grant system.

In this context J. Charpentier has given an important place to the location of Śūrpāraka [Sopārā in Nasik], which he thinks must have been derived from the sūrpa mentioned in some legends that was hurled by Paraśurāma. Consequently, the foundation of that port was connected by tradition with the recovery of the Konkana by Paraśurāma. As Śūrpāraka must have already existed as a place of some importance at the time of Aśoka [c. 250 BC], the story of Paraśurāma's recovery of land from the ocean may have had its genesis in pre-Christian centuries.[30] However, the issue remains unresolved.

Moreover, different dates need to be assigned for the association of different regions with the land reclamation myth, which might have been linked with the migration of brahmans along the western coast from Gujarat to Malabar. Certainly Malabar came to be associated with this myth at the latest date. It is also possible that this myth might have emerged in the folk tradition at an early date in the Gujarat region and was ignored for a long time by the Puranic tradition. The origin of any myth in the popular domain and its inclusion in a literary text is always marked by a time gap.

The most likely locale for the origin of the land reclamation myth seems to be the Gujarat region and by the time that brahmanical settlements were established in Maharashtra, it had attained the status of an elaborate narrative. Inscription and literary evidences reveal that these settlers had occupied the Karnataka region immediately before the establishment of these settlements in Kerala. This in turn was a continuation of similar settlements in the Konkan and Saurāṣṭra coasts. All these settlers promoted the belief that their land was created and donated to them by Paraśurāma. It seems that the Paraśurāma legend originated in

Gujarat and it is likely that this legend also moved along with the moving people.[31] In other words, the brahmana settlement of Kerala constituted the last link of a long chain of migratory movement along with the west coast carrying with it the tradition of Paraśurāma.[32]

The Significance of the land creation myth

Scholars have interpreted the myth of land reclamation in various ways, but most of them believe that it represents some real historical or geological event in the past of the western coast. One point of view proposes that probably Paraśurāma was the leader of the early colonisers of the west coast regions who wielded the axe to clear the dense forest for making the area fit for human habitation." [33]

Charpentier suggested that Paraśurāma probably rooted out clans of warriors belonging to foreign descent, who were at that time in possession of Konkan and regions bordering it. After this he led in those parts an invasion of northern brahmanas and of people who lived according to the rules of brahmanised society. It was originally an episode in the long history of the spread of the north Indian civilisation and institutions in the South. Paraśurāma's war against some foreign kshatriyas and an invasion of the Konkan coast remains unsubstantiated.[34] Paraśurāma's acceptance as a conqueror of Konkan and a historical figure also poses several questions regarding his association with Rāmahṛda in Kurukṣetra and regions of Himachal Pradesh as well as his connection with the Ṛgvedic Bhṛgu and Jamadagni.

Irawati Karve held the view that the Paraśurāma myth seems to contain two independent elements. One is the semi-historical tradition of Paraśurāma being the father of the people of the western coast, and the other an explanation about the recedence of the sea. She underlined that the belief about the recedence of the sea is prevalent throughout the western ghats. But everywhere, it is related as a local occurrence. In Gujarat, it is the plain of Bhinmal that is said to have come out of the sea. In the south west it stretches from Gōkarṇa to Cochin while some accounts refer only to the

Konkan region. The common denominator in all these versions is that Paraśurāma is everywhere the hero and nowhere is it related to the entire coastal strip. Therefore, it might have originated independently in these several places. These popular narratives try to highlight two things. First, in olden times the western sea stretched up to the Sahyādri range, or the western ghats. Therefore, the Konkan region is a gift of the sea and second, Paraśurāma was believed to be instrumental in the settling of the brahmanas in this area.

Other scholars have emphasised that some kind of geological upheaval may have been responsible for the development of this legend.[35] For example, H. Sarkar[36] says that it is not unlikely that the Paraśurāma legend preserves a distant memory of some reclamation of land from the sea, but the date of this event is hard to compute in the present state of our historical research. It is well known that numerous changes have taken place in the recent Pleistocene along the coasts. Many new coastlines have emerged or old areas have gone under the sea. For example, a large part of the Palk Strait or the Gulf of Mannar has been submerged in recent times. Along the Kerala coast also mud banks from the Pleistocene to the recent age came up, separating the lake-like formation from the sea.[37] That such geological upheavals continued in historical times is evident from a reference in the *Mūṣakavaṃśa*, a Sanskrit epic of the 11th century, which records the encroachment of the sea that eventually engulfed the famous Buddhist monastery at Sri-Mulavāsa.[38] It is important to note that not so long ago, the Island of Vypeen, about 20 km north of Cochin, was thrown up by the sea. It is known in the locality as Pudu Vaippu, i.e. new foundation, and the people there commence an era from the date of its formation in CE 1341. The earliest references to Malabar do not mention Cochin at all. Among the mediaeval travellers, Nicolo Conti [CE 1440] mentions it for the first time as Cocym. There are other local instances of the eruption of the sea and the subsidence of the land in the region.[39] Therefore, constant upheavals on the seacoast with emergence of new land might have helped to spread this myth with a strong realistic foundation. It

also throws light on the role of myths in preserving popular memory in the psyche of the Indian people. K.V. Ramesh has tried to visualise this legend, as an attempt to preserves the faint memory of a hero with an axe as his weapon. It highlights long years of industry and suffering of the Iron Age man involved in the clearing of the forest and finally settling down to an agricultural life on the western coastal tract. It may be a part of the collective memory preserved as the myth of creation of the Tuḷuva region.[40]

In south India, the myth of *kṣetra* has been an important feature of the Paraśurāma tradition. Therefore, many sacred spaces have been perceived as his creation. It is said that Paraśurāma established seven liberation providing zones on the western sea coast. 1. Rajatpīṭha 2. Kumārādri 3. Kumbhakāśī 4. Dhvajeśwara 5. Śaṅkaranārāyaṇa 6. Gōkarṇa 7. Mukāmbika. Even Trichur is believed to be a *Paraśurāma kṣetra*. Paraśurāma reclaimed this land from the ocean and got it settled. Mukāmbika, a *mukti kṣetra* created by Paraśurāma is around 65 km from Udupi. In Kullur there is a temple of Mukambika Devi which is believed to have been established by Paraśurāma. Similarly Udupi, located on the eastern side of the western ghats and in the west of the Arabian Sea, is said to be situated in the *Paraśurāma kṣetra* spreading in the south Kanara district. But Rajatpīṭha is the most important among them. Paraśurāma worshipped Śiva at this place and the linga allegedly established by him is called Ananteśvara. A *Subrahmaṇya kṣetra* situated in the south Kanara on the eastern side of Puttur taluka is also counted among the seven *tīrthas* of the *Paraśurāma kṣetra*. A huge temple of Subrhamaṇya situated here is attributed to Paraśurāma.[41] Punganur, situated to the west of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh is also known as Paraśurāma Kṣetra as the sage Paraśurāma is believed to have performed penance here.[42]

2. The Myth of *Kuṇḍas* and *Tīrthas*

Just like the creation of *kṣetras*, Paraśurāma is also credited with the creation of the river Lohit along with the sanctification of many *kuṇḍas* and *sarovars*. The *Kalikā Purāṇa* says that Paraśurāma

became so impressed with the efficacy of the water of Brahmakuṇḍa that he brought it to the plains of Kāmarūpa in order to consecrate the entire region.[43] Therefore among his *tīrthas* Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa, which is situated at the place where the river Lohit emerges from the mountain and enters the plains, has an important place. It is surrounded on every side by hills. The top of the hillock was popularly known as *Deobari* in earlier literature. Now it lies in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh, which has Tezu as its headquarter.

This *kuṇḍa* is also referred to as Brahmakuṇḍa. The question is when did this *kuṇḍa* get associated with the myth of Paraśurāma? It should be noted that the river that is now called Lohit is perhaps the river Lauhitya mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. Most probably the red colour of the water inspired the people of this area to give it such a name. But it became a suitable tool to associate it with the myth of Paraśurāma and it is believed that since Paraśurāma washed his blood-stained axe in this river, its water became red, and so it was called Lohit. Hence, the name of river itself was linked to the myth of Paraśurāma.[44]

Tīirthayātrāparva in the Āraṇyakaparva of the *Mahābhārata* also associates Paraśurāma with Lauhitya. It says that in earlier times due to the power of Rāma, many *tīrthas* emerged and Lauhitya is one of them, and whosoever takes bath in that *tīrtha* gets a lot of gold.[45] The second important allusion comes from Kālidāsa, who shows familiarity with Paraśurāma's association with Lohit.[46] Therefore, it is certain that this myth had developed before the 5th century. The *Padma Purāṇa*[47] mentions this myth in detail. Lauhitya was born when the semen of Brahmā fell into the womb of Amoghā, the wife of Śantanu. After this story the text goes on to the narrative of Paraśurāma in the same breath. It says that having killed all the kshatriyas, Paraśurāma was wandering from place to place seeking to wash off his sins but was unable to do so. Then he heard a divine voice which said: 'O lord of gods there is a sacred place in a cave in the eastern direction.' He went there and saw the holy pool, to the south where [i.e. in the water of which] there was an eddy, which was bright and which removed

all sins. His axe became clean merely by the touch of its water. Then Rāma having lived there for a long time and having propitiated it, speedily reached the city from that mountain. Making it famous, he went to the sea. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* also repeats this story in almost similar words.[48]

Some later texts, such as the *Yoginī Tantra* also mention the myth of matricide in connection with this *kuṇḍa*.[49] A copper plate inscription of Indrapāla, a ruler of 11th century, mentions this myth and says, "The water which got the red colour through the washing of the axe by Paraśurāma, who killed the kshatriyas and the water which emanated from the body of Brahmā may help to cleanse all the sins of the age".[50] In the 13th century, Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa was part of the Chutiya kingdom whose king had exchanged the water of Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa with the water of the Ganga from a ruler, probably of Bengal.[51] However, the British explorers of the region mention it as Brahmakuṇḍa. Except a couple of land grants even most of the medieval references also mention it as Brahma Kuṇḍa. Some anthropological field studies have suggested that a *sādhu* came to this place in either the 18th[52] or the 19th[53] century who popularised the legend of Paraśurāma among the local population of Mishmis. The *sādhu* himself was called Paraśurāma Baba by the local people. However, in the early 20th century, there were times when no *sādhu* was living in that area and pilgrims were also not visiting the place.[54] Therefore, it seems that the ancient tradition of the Paraśurāma legend had died out and was revived again in this region in the modern period. This observation throws light on the multiple life cycles of a myth, which might have been the case with other mythical figures and *tīrthas* as well. Nevertheless, the importance of the Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa among the *tīrthas* of Vaiṣṇavas, and specially of the Paraśurāma cult, which centres around expiation of his sins of genocide and matricide can not be underestimated. Significantly, there exist many *kuṇḍas* and *sarovaras* in different parts of India which associate themselves with the sin destroying penance of Paraśurāma. Each one of them claims that Paraśurāma could overcome his sin only after taking a bath there.

Kundin village, situated on the right bank of River Banas, is an important example of such *tīrtha*. This village lies in Rashmi tehsil, which is 60 km to the north-west of Chittaurgarh town of Rajasthan. About 6 km from Rashmi is situated this village which has an ancient *tīrtha* called Matri Kuṇḍin. It is an important religious place for pilgrims who bathe here in a pool. The place has been considered sacred for the performance of *śrāddha* ceremonies and the immersion of last remains. It is said that the sins of matricide committed by Paraśurāma were washed away on his bathing in its waters. An annual fair is held here on the Vaiśākha *Pūrṇimā* and is largely attended. There is also a temple dedicated to Mangaleśvar Mahādeva.[55]

Similarly, between Alwar and Rewari railway stations and 4–5 km from Khairthal–Harsauli station, there is a hill called Rainagiri on which there is a *kuṇḍa* in the name of Paraśurāma. Perhaps this hill was earlier named Raingiri that has now become Rainagiri.[56] Again, on the Ahmedabad–Delhi railway line, nearly 70 km from Ahmedabad is a railway station called Falna and 15 km from there is a village called Rajpur. At a distance of 4 km from the village is a *kuṇḍa*, which is called Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa. On a nearby hillock there is a temple, which is called Paraśurāma Mahādeva.[57]

In Andhra Pradesh a place called Atterala in Rajampet taluk is famous as a *Paraśurāma tīrtha* and pilgrimage centre. The *utsava* at Atterala, held during the month of *Māgha* [January-February] is attended by thousands of devotees. Atterala is a corruption of 'Hatyarala', the place where the sin of matricide was atoned for. Legend has it that Paraśurāma finally cleansed off his blood-stained hands, after killing his mother, in the local Bahuda river, the stains not being washed away in any other holy centres. 'Hatyā' in Sanskrit means murder and 'Ralu' in Telugu means fall off. Thus 'Atterala' or 'Hatyarala' means the place where the sin of matricide was atoned for.[58]

On the left bank of River Tunga, 55 km south-west of Shimoga, there is another religious place called Tirthahalli. The town derives its name from the number of *tīrthas* or sacred bathing places in

the Tunga at or near this spot. A pool at one of the cylindrical hollows scooped out by the water in the rocky bed is a favourite spot for cleansing away sin by ablution. The formation of the hole is ascribed to Paraśurāma, who created it with his axe. At the Rameshvara festival, held for three days in *Mārgaśīrṣa*, thousands of people pass through the hole.[59]

There are also instances of associating the name of Paraśurāma with man-made ponds and waterworks of more recent origin. Ratnāgiri in Maharashtra provides one such example. On the Jyotiba Hill, which is also called Vādi Ratnagiri, there are temples of Jyotiba, Kedāraliṅga, Kedāreśvara, Chopdai and Yamai. In front of Yamai temple there are two sacred cisterns, one of which is said to have been built by Jijabai Shāhib about 1743; the other is called Jāmadagnya tīrtha, which was built by Rānoji Sindhia.[60] Another instance can be seen at Govalkot Fort, Chiplun, where it is said that the sixty legendary ponds were dug by Paraśurāma. Now there are traces of only eight reservoirs in various parts of the town. The biggest of them is called the Rāma tīrtha to the east of the town. There is a small temple and a rest-house close by, and the banks are used as a cremation ground.[61]

At Prayāga, on the confluence of the Yamuna and the Ganga, there is a *Paraśurāma tīrtha* near Papamochana Tīrtha, Goghattan Tīrtha, Piśācha Mochan Tīrtha and Kapila Tīrtha, etc. In the Dariabad locality a little ahead of Baruaghat, there is also a place called Jamadagni ashram.[62] It presents an interesting insight into how the same act of a particular mythical personality is claimed to have taken place by different people exclusively in their region. It also sheds light on the role of myths in the creation of regional identities and self-respect of the communities living therein. But by claiming similar exclusivity, they unite with each other to produce a bewildering unity in the diversity of India.

Since most of *Paraśurāma tīrthas* are centred on the narrative of his sin-destroying bath, therefore all early *Paraśurāma tīrthas* developed around some kind of water body. Among such sacred spots Rāmahṛda and Samantapañchaka in Kurukṣetra are

considered to be the most important and their *māhātmya* is repeated several times in the *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas. The first reference to Samantapañchaka comes in the first chapter of the *Mahābhārata*, in Anukramaṇikāparva of Ādiparva.[63] Later in the Parvasaṃgrahaparva[64] the myth of this *tīrtha* is narrated in detail by Sūta Ugraśravā.

This sudden introduction of a Paraśurāma legend at this place of the text has been seen as an attempt to insert the story of a Bhārgava without any valid context in order to boost the image of the clan.[65] Without ruling out this possibility, at least for this particular reference, one must look at other aspects of the inclusion as well. This entire section must have been composed after the final redaction of the *Mahābhārata* to provide some kind of index to the epic. The tone of this narrative is very much in the Puranic mould. There is emphasis on the kshatriya annihilation narrative and expiation rituals as one may find in the context of other *tīrtha* myths. Moreover, it is also important to note that this section, which is an abridged version of a dialogue occurring in the Tīrthayātrāparva, is found only in certain Devanāgari MSS. It is missing in the Bengali MSS as well as in the entire Southern recension. So all indicators point in a direction where one cannot take this myth to be from a period when this epic was in the early stage of its development. It will be difficult to assume that this text remained in the possession of the Bhṛgus right from the early phase to a very late stage when even some Puranic features were being incorporated in the text.[66]

This narrative is focused on explaining the emergence of Samantapañcaka as a *tīrtha*. It says that after the extermination of the kshatriyas during the interval between *tretā* and *dvāpara*, Rāma Jāmadagnya had made five pools of blood, probably forming a circle [hence called Samantapañchaka]. Standing in the middle of these pools, he offered oblation of blood to the manes. His ancestor Ṛchika and others appeared before him and pacified him. They asked him to shun violence and leave the surviving kshatriyas alive. Paraśurāma asked for the boon of freedom from sins occurring due to this bloodbath and also wished that these pools should

become a famous holy place of pilgrimage on the earth, which he was granted. That is how this *tīrtha* came into existence. This narrative is repeated in the Tīrthayātrāparva of Āraṇayakaparva.[67] Nevertheless, two new elements appear here. The first is related to the *śrāddha* ritual and the other one is about getting gold as religious merit of this *tīrtha.*

Tīrthayātrāparva, which is a virtual directory of the Indian *tīrthas,* mentions some *tīrthas* associated with Paraśurāma, too. While describing *tīrthas* of the Kurukṣetra region, it narrates the importance of *tīrthas* such as Brahmakṣetra, Sata tīrtha, Prithavi tīrtha, Varāha tīrtha, Soma tīrtha, Kṛtasaucha tīrtha, and Yakṣiṇī tīrtha. Then the narrative talks about a *tīrtha* on the gateway of Kurukṣetra which is equivalent to Puṣkara in importance and which was created by Paraśurāma. Devotees are expected to worship their manes in that *tīrtha* which would give them merit of performing the horse sacrifice. After that pilgrims are asked to visit Rāmahṛda, where Paraśurāma created the five pools of blood. The narrative repeats the same story of boon and this place becoming a famous *tīrtha* and it is said that one who takes bath in these pools and worship Paraśurāma, gets a lot of gold. Rāmahṛada is again mentioned in another chapter of the epic, which includes a strange story of how a sinful woman achieved her salvation.[68]

The description of the Kurukṣetra region as the greatest of the *tīrthas* and the *māhātmya* of Rāmahṛada occurs in the Purāṇas also. The *Padma Purāṇa*[69] narrates, "O best of Bhāratas, that is a well-known gate to Kurukṣetra. The pilgrimage turning to the right, and having bathed at Saṃsmṛta of the Puṣkara, should worship the deities in the form of manes. Rāma, the noble son of Jamadagni, invoked them here only. O king, the man would have accomplished his object and obtain the fruit of a horse sacrifice. O king, thence the pilgrim should go to Rāmahṛda, where, O lord of kings, Rāma, of a blazing lustre having powerfully and speedily expelled the kshatriyas, resorted to the five deep lakes after filling them with blood. He offered oblation to his forefathers, and also his great grandsirs." Thereafter, the text describes how this place became a famous *tīrtha* through the boon of the ancestors to Paraśurāma.

It also says that a man of self-control and good vows after bathing in the lake of Paraśurāma and worshipping him, would obtain much gold. This narrative is almost similar to the one related in the Tīrthayātrāparva of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Nārada Purāṇa* also recounts the greatness of Rāmatīrtha and Rāmahṛda in the region of Kurukṣetra or Samantapañchaka.[70]

There seems to be some relationship between the cult of Brahmā and Paraśurāma. About Kurukṣetra, the *Nārada Purāṇa*[71] says: "At the holy spot, the meritorious Brahmasara, [the lake of Brahmā] came into being at the outset. Then the Rāmahṛda [deep pool of Paraśurāma] came into being and thereafter Kurukṣetra [the land ploughed by King Kuru]. It was originally known as Brahmasara as god Brahmā performed penance on its bank. Paraśurāma performed the *tarpaṇa* of his *pitṛ* here and hence it is called Rāmahṛada." The *Vāmana Purāṇa*[72] repeats that originally this tract of land was called *vedi* [sacrificial altar] of Brahmā. Later, when Paraśurāma filled five pools with the blood of kshatriyas, it became known as Rāmahṛda or Samantapañchaka. Finally, when King Kuru, the son of Saṃvaraṇa ploughed this land with a golden plough for fourteen *yojana* all round, it came to be known as Kurukṣetra, i.e. the farmland of Kuru. Similarly, in Puṣkara also the myth of Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa overlaps or is contiguous to that of Brahmā. In Arunachal Pradesh the Brahmakuṇḍa and Paraśurāmakuṇḍa overlap in nomenclature and identity completely.

While discussing the *tīrthas* of eastern India, *Tirthayātrāparva* in the *Mahābhārata* makes reference to Lauhitya tīrtha[73] which developed due to the glory of Paraśurāma and a bath there is said to give lot of gold. In the same section, Mahendra Parvat[74] is also described. It says that the one who goes there and takes a bath in the Rāmatīrtha gets the merit of performing the horse sacrifice. It also indicates that Mahendra Parvat was believed to have been in the Orissa region and not on the western coast. This place is mentioned in another chapter as a place of residence of Paraśurāma where Brahmā had performed a sacrifice in the early period.

Another Paraśurāma *tīrtha* referred to in this text is Śūrpāraka,[75] which is indicated to be on the western coast. Pilgrims

are recommended to visit this *tīrtha* and take a bath in the Rāmatīrtha there, which again is said to give gold. This *tīrtha* is again mentioned after a while in the text as a *vedi* of Jamadagni. Reṇukā tīrtha[76] is mentioned in this section which seems to be somewhere in western India at the mouth of river Sindhu/Sagara-Sindhu Sangam. Jamadagni ashram[77] and Bhṛgutuṅga[78] are also described in these sections. One of the Paraśurāma *tīrthas* is depicted as a gateway to Mānasarover which is sequenced after a description of Kashmir. It is said that Paraśurāma had established his hermitage here in the midst of the mountain range.[79] In the Dānadharmaparva of Anuśāsanaparva, several *tīrthas* related to Paraśurāma such as Lauhitya, Rāmahṛda and Śūrpāraka have been mentioned along with their religious merits.[80] This is a part of the general description of many other *tīrthas* and their *māhātmyas*. The Śāntiparva also associates the Muñjavata *tīrtha* with the vow of Paraśurāma.[81]

The Paraśurāma cult is a living tradition and has many surviving *tīrthas* with almost no durable or noticeable architectural presence, but they are quite popular at the local level and have been recorded as places of pilgrimage or *tīrtha*. For example, Pṛthūdaka [Pehova], which is nearly 20 km from Thanesara [Haryana] is situated, at a religious place called Rāmatirtha. It is believed that this is the place where Paraśurāma performed his sacrifice. At this spot people still worship Paraśurāma and his parents Jamadagni and Reṇukā.[82] Similarly, Rāmahṛda near Jinda railway station is a famous holy *tīrtha*. People believe that Paraśurāma performed his sacrifice here. On the bank of cemented pond there are temples. There are two other *tīrthas* near this place. Even at Sannahita in Jinda, which is compared to Sannahita of Kurukshetra as a famous *tīrtha*, one finds a reference to the worship of Paraśurāma. On the occasion of the solar and lunar eclipse, a big fair is organized at this place. In the months of Vaiśākha and Kārttika also fairs take place. Pilgrims take baths in this *tīrtha* and perform the worship of Paraśurāma and his father Jamadagni and mother Reṇukā.[83]

3. The Temples and Shrines of Paraśurāma

One of the major concerns of this work has been to show that Paraśurāma was not a mere mythical sage growing into an avatāra of Viṣṇu; rather, he was a cult figure too, who enjoyed a larger support base with diverse sections of society as its followers. This cult also attracted some investment of resources from the elite of the society, resulting in the development of cult centres in almost all parts of India. It is also significant to note that this cult had a less visible presence in the Ganga valley, which was the centre of brahmanism. Some of the temples and shrines of Paraśurāma have been discussed below,[84] but this should not be taken as an exhaustive enumeration of such shrines. It just indicates the reach of the Paraśurāma cult in different parts of India and how he maintained the status of an independent cult figure despite repeated attempts by Viṣṇuism and Śivaism to integrate him within their own fold.

One may start from Andhra Pradesh, which has a Paraśurāma shrine at Atterala, which might have been a very important religious centre at one point of time. It lies about 9 km from Rajampet, a place of considerable antiquity with a temple of Paraśurāma. When Longhurst visited this temple in 1913, he found it in a ruined and deserted state. It was then a part of government property and was no longer in use as a place of worship. However, it has been restored to a great extent in recent times. The carving on the outer walls of the sanctum, although faded, indicates the artistic exuberance of the artisans of the days gone by. They include floral representations, women in dancing poses, and images of Viṣṇu, Paraśurāma, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. The miniature *chaitya* crowning the sanctum is still in existence.

Originally, the sanctum of this temple enshrined an almost life-sized image of Paraśurāma, executed in a light buff-coloured stone. He is depicted as standing to attention with a drawn sword in his right hand. Unlike most brahmanical images, the sculpture is in the "round". The statue was removed from the sanctum, perhaps by treasure-seekers. It was set up in the front of the sanctum

entrance and remained buried in the floor up to the knees for a long time.

As far as architectural features are concerned, the sanctum is almost square in plan and faces due west. The lower portion, up to the cornice, is built of stone and decorated with well-carved mythological figures, diminutive pilasters, and ornamental mouldings. The small tower above this is built of brick originally plastered and decorated with stucco figures. Instead of being crowned with a dome-shaped canopy—like ornament with a high metal finial as is usually found in ancient temples of southern India—the summit of the roof takes the form of a small Buddhist *chaitya*, or assembly hall, with the usual wagon-headed temples at Māmallapuram. In front of the shrine is a fairly large-pillared hall with a low flat roof supported by 20 stone pillars with plain bracket capitals. In plan, these pillars are circular, and the shafts are round from the base to the cap, and free from all ornament. Although they do not appear to taper towards the top to any perceptible degree, they are nevertheless true columns, and almost classical in appearance in spite of their want of a proper procession path. This portion, like the hall in front, is covered with a low flat roof. The interior is very dark and gloomy, the only entrance being a small doorway in the wall on the outside of the hall. The wall surface of the hall and circumambulatory passages around the sanctum are free from all ornament. But for a small single window in the gable end of the miniature *chaitya* which crowns the roof, the interior of the sanctum would be in total darkness. It is quite obvious that the hall and passage were added to the building after the main shrine was erected, but how long after, it is difficult to say. This addition ruined the structure from the architectural point of view by obstructing from view the excellent sculpture and mouldings on the exterior walls of the sanctum. Here and there, just below the cornice, one may catch a glimpse of well-carved stone figures.[85]

Seven inscriptions were found on the exterior face of the south wall of the pillared hall in front of the shrine and on two detached stones planted in the ground on the south side of the entrance to

the temple enclosure. Among the inscriptions at this place, is one referring to Rājarāja III [CE.1232] Another inscription of S.1194 [CE1272] records the joint venture of the residents of Pottapindu to construct embankments on the river for protecting the Paraśurāma temple from floods; the inscription of S.1399 [CE.1477] refers to Saluva Narasingayya Deva Maharaja.[86]

At Guddimallam in Srikalahasti taluk, Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh there is another temple of Paraśurāma. Guddimallam is situated on the banks of the river Swarnamukhi, near Papanaidupet. The village contains an ancient but beautiful temple dedicated to Paraśurāmesvara which is said to have been built by the Pallava king. A nearby area of Punganur is called *Paraśurāma kṣetra*.[87] A list of ancient monuments in the Madras Presidency mentioned a Paraśurāma temple here that was in private ownership.[88]

In Arunachal Pradesh a temple of Paraśurāma exists near the famous Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa. However, a stone image of Paraśurāma is worshipped in a natural cave by pilgrims after taking a holy bath since the early 1950s during the local mela. The present Paraśurāma temple at the Kuṇḍa was constructed in 1971 by Sri Krishnalal Nandanlal of Chauba, Assam. The temple enshrines a number of deities and at the centre there is a huge marble statue of Paraśurāma. To his left, on a raised platform is a smaller but similar statue of Paraśurāma himself and others of Pārvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya. In front of the Paraśurāma image there is a Śivaliṅga and bull facing the south.[89]

The temple of Paraśurāma is built in cement and concrete. The *garbhagriha* is extended atop into a solid *śikhara* with crown and *kalaśa*. In front of the main sanctum is the portico of a flat roof but at the centre raised into a hemispherical crown culminated with a *kalaśa* on the top.[90] Thus the architectural presence of the Paraśurāma cult in this region is very recent. It is an example of how a *tīrtha* of such divinities may continue without any architectural presence for centuries.

Although the middle Ganga plain has not yielded any significant spot, either mythological or ritual, of importance related to Paraśurāma, a couple of sites may be found there too. The Areraj

temple complex in East Champaran district of Bihar has the lone Paraśurāma temple identified in the state. A field visit to this temple has brought out some very significant dimensions. People of this area are not familiar with any Paraśurāma temple here. The first official information about this Paraśurāma temple was recorded by T. Bloch, Archaeological Surveyor, Bengal Circle, during 1900–1901. During a survey of Champaran district, his assistant R.C. Mukherjee noted three important monuments that may be preserved in the district, namely the Aśoka Pillar, the temple of Paraśurāma and the temple of Areraj Mahādeva, of which last two are said to be 'modern'.[91]

The most important thing about the Areraj temple is its appropriation by the cult of Śri Rāma. It is as if the mythical defeat of Paraśurāma at the hands of the former has been enacted on the ground, in the arena of the sacred space. Although behind the statues of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣamaṇa the two-feet-tall image of Paraśurāma is still placed in the central niche of the *sanctum sanctorum* of the temple, it is not visible to any devotee from the outside. This image was painted in grey nearly seven years ago. Originally it was perhaps made of black stone. The painting also signifies that this has now become a decorative piece and has ceased to be a cultic symbol.

The structure and positioning of the Paraśurāma image makes it quite clear that this temple was originally devoted to Paraśurāma. But the local priest does not know when this transition occurred. His father was the traditional priest before him till the early 1980s. This temple is now called Thakurbari. It seems that it was constructed by one of the Bhumihar chiefs of this area. However, the current patron of this shrine is a person of Kalwar [a backward] caste, who has donated nearly 25 bighas of land to the temple. The date of construction of this temple could not be ascertained but this temple bears a stone slab, which has a date of CE 1874, which seems to be the date of renovation or additional constructions. How and when this transition took place is a subject of further research, but even a recent work does not mention anything about this feature of this temple.[92] Certainly the cult of

Paraśurāma became meaningless for the general people who happen to be the real patrons of any temple. Therefore, change in social dynamics might have led to the change in the occupant of the sacred space too. It also throws light on the complex process of the reuse of such monuments and shrines in Indian history.

Another temple of Paraśurāma in Bihar is reported from Barauni. It is situated near the railway station but neither archaeological nor anthropological sources indicate any such temple from that location. It seems that it is a recently constructed temple patronised by local Bhumihar caste. Some people believe that this caste has a Brhmakshatra lineage [i.e. a caste having both brahmana and kshatriya lineages] like Paraśurāma. The Paraśurāma cult shows signs of revival in other parts of India too. For example, in Haryana, Paraśurāma jayanti is now a public holiday. In past few years, one finds an increasing number of caste associations organising functions on that occasion, specially in western UP and Haryana. One should not be surprised if several new temples of Paraśurāma are constructed in various parts of India due to upward social mobility of many castes.

According to K.B. Dave, there are a couple of temples of Paraśurāma in Gujarat probably owing to his traditional association with the river Narmada where Jamadagni's hermitage was supposed to have been situated.[93] But details of these temples could not be located.

Although the modern state of Haryana has many sacred spots related to the myth of Paraśurāma, his temple is established only at one location. At Jind, a religious fair called Rama Rai fair is celebrated on *pūrṇamāṣhī* in Vaiśākha [April-May] and Kārttika [October-November] with a lot of pomp and gaiety. Ram Rai is also known as Rāmahṛda and they are believed to be connected with Paraśurāma, who is said to have killed the kshatriyas at this place. The idols of Paraśurāma and his parents Jamadagni and Reṇukā are placed in a temple here. People perform *pūjā* after taking a bath in the Sanet tīrtha, a nearby holy tank.[94]

The findings of this research suggest that Himachal Pradesh has the highest number of Paraśurāma shrines. Nirmanda is one

of the most important sites for the study of the Paraśurāma cult. This village is situated in the Kullu district of the state and lies nearly 13 km from Rampur Bushar on the bank of the river Sutluj. Rampur is about 160 km from Shimla. Many published reports describe that there is a temple having a huge structure, where Paraśurāma is the guardian deity and his bronze image holding an axe is enshrined inside a cave.[95] There is another temple in front of this cave. This image is called Kālkām Paraśurāma by the local people. The metal mask-like image has three faces, one from the left is called Kāla, the middle one is Kāma and one in the right is called Paraśurāma. It is interesting that the image in the Chiplun temple is also called by the same name. It seems that this was an effort to integrate Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva in the cult of Paraśurāma.

However, the field survey at the shrine revealed that it is not a regular temple but a shrine which opens only on the occasion of the *bhuṇḍā* sacrifice,[96] supposed to be held every twelve years. Hence, no daily rituals are performed in this shrine. The local people call it the *kothi* of Paraśurāma and they stress that it should not be called a temple. They believe that since Paraśurāma is a *chirañjīvī*, a living entity, therefore his temple cannot be constructed. It is believed that Paraśurāma is still performing penance inside the cave and comes out every twelve years on the occasion of the *bhuṇḍā* sacrifice. In the intervening years, the *kothi* remains closed and no ritual is observed, except the annual *śrāddha* ritual of Paraśurāma's parents outside the temple complex, which is a low-key affair. The complex resembles a monastic establishment more than a temple observing daiiy rituals.

Since one is not in position to visit the inside of the structure, the nature of shrine is difficult to verify. However, we were informed by a local elder, Mr. Hukmanand Sharma [80 years], that the original cave image was gifted to the then British Assistant Commissioner by the trustee of the temple in 1922 in lieu of certain official favours and a duplicate image was put in its place. Similarly, the outer image also has many interesting stories about it. Again, popular local traditions indicate that nearly 300 years

ago the outer image was stolen and exchanged by some Nāgā sadhus during a *bhuṇḍā* sacrifice. They replaced it with another image and on the basis of that image these Nāgās claimed that the shrine belonged to their cult and established their control over entire property and the shrine at Nirmanda, which had more than 5000 acres of land at that time. Nearly 80 years ago they were driven out with the help of the local Raja by a cunning brahman called Saunt. It is claimed that the original image is still lying somewhere in the Northeast, probably at the Brahmakuṇḍa temple. But it is difficult to ascertain the veracity of this narrative.

A theft took place in this shrine in 1984 and although nearly 80 pieces of other icons, including the images of Varuṇa, Vāruṇi and Reṇukā and jewelleries were recovered by the police in Delhi, the main image of Kālkāma Paraśurāma could not be recovered. Its duplicate image was produced by the local goldsmith on the basis of the photographs of the earlier image and was placed in the *kothi*. But even this one had not been consecrated till 1999, because it could be done only on the occasion of the *bhuṇḍā* sacrifice, which had not taken place since 1984. Therefore, none of the main images in Nirmanda can claim to be the original or ancient one.

The Paraśurāma temple is also famous for its possession of a copper plate deed of a grant in Sanskrit, probably of CE.612–13, recording the assignment of a village of Sulisagrāma by a king Samudrasena to the brahmanas, who studied the *Atharvaveda* at Nirmanda, a temple dedicated to the god Tripurantaka or Śiva under the name of Mihireśvara or the Sun god.[97] It is difficult to ascertain the identity of the king Samudrasena, but it seems that he belonged to a dynasty of kings bearing the surname or suffix of 'Sena', who controlled Spiti in very early times.[98]

The architecture of the Paraśurāma temple at Nirmanda is a pent roof structure built over a round stone plinth. At the entrance of the temple, some elephant and *makara* sculptures are carved in bas relief. On the outer masonry wall, there is an enclosure, a part of which is used for worship. In this enclosure a human head is worshipped by the devotees. This represents the primeval form of

worship originally in vogue in the area, earning it the title of Naramuṇḍa, which ultimately changed to Nirmanda. On the one side of this temple there is an idol of the terrible Hiḍimbā and on the doorway a temple of Bhairava is also present. At the entrance of the temple is placed a stone *dvārapāla* image. The temple has heavy doors, which have carvings of scrolls and foliage. Two doors have the image of Gaṇeśa. The date of the Paraśurāma temple at Nirmanda is difficult to ascertain but it may tentatively be dated between CE 7th and 12th centuries. [99]

There are many other shrines of Paraśurāma in Himachal Pradesh. One such temple was located at village Kāu, in the old principality of Suket, in the district of Kullu. ASI Northern circle had taken a photograph of the temple of Kāmākhsa Devi and Paraśurāma during 1910–11.[100] Similarly, four other shrines at Pab, Ghalija, Narayana and Bandal, all situated in Nahan, have been reported by the Town and Village Directory of the Census of India.[101] No other detail could be ascertained. Sirmaur district in general has many temples and shrines related to Paraśurāma, but one particular tehsil has been named after Reṇukā herself and has the highest number of such shrines. The most important among them is called Reṇukā tīrtha and is centred around the Reṇukā lake.

The sacred Reṇukā lake is the most important place in Sirmur district. After crossing the Giri mountain, the visitor reaches Reṇukā Lake at its narrower end. On the way falls another small lake, which is called Paraśurāma-Tal. The oval-shaped Reṇukā Lake has a circumference of about 2.4 km and runs south west to north east. The shape of the lake appears to the local people as to vaguely resemble a human figure. Reṇukā is believed to have disappeared, leaving behind this lake in place of her body.

There are two temples of Paraśurāma in Rainaka/Renukā tehsil of Himachal Pradesh. The older one is a pentroof structure built over a hillock on the bank of the Paraśurāma Tank facing west. The temple has an interesting stone sculpture of Gaṇeśa. The second is a square temple with a domed roof surmounted by a bronze pinnacle. The doors of the temple face east, north and south.

The temple contains, besides the image of Paraśurāma, images of deities including the sage Jamadagni and his consort Reṇukā, Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Durgā, the five Pāṇḍavas and Kedār Bhairava.[102] Our field visit to the Reṇukā lake revealed that most of the extant images are very contemporary in their features. Thus, leave alone ancient remains, there is difficulty in finding even medieval structures at this site. This also throws a significant light on the lack of concern among the priestly classes and managers of the shrines in India towards older images.

Other temples enshrining the images of Paraśurāma in this Rainaka tehsil are located at Jamu Koti, Masho and Dagana.[103] The temple of Paraśurāma at Jamu Koti, which is believed to be the birthplace of the god Paraśurāma, has three stories, enshrining the image of Paraśurāma in the topmost storey. The image of Paraśurāma is bedecked with a gold *chhatra*, a necklace of silver coins and a gold *mohar* with a diamond studded in the middle of it.[104] The god Paraśurāma in the Jamu temple is also worshipped as a guardian against cattle diseases.[105] Even Jamala in Sirmur district has a temple dedicated to Paraśurāma, where a brass image of the deity is enshrined and which has been dated around CE 17th –18th century.[106]

Karnataka presents a unique feature where the Paraśurāma cult is deeply integrated with the cult of Reṇukā, which in turn is associated with the cult of Yellammā. Most of the shrines where Paraśurāma exists as a deity, are primarily dedicated to these goddesses. Another feature is the absence of the independent cult of Jamadagni as we find in the case of the lower Himalayas. In these areas the cult of Reṇukā and Paraśurāma exists as a mother–child cult. Except in Kerala, these features are true more or less for entire southern India.

Chandragutti is primarily a site related to Reṇukā, who perhaps took over the cult of Yellammā in this region through conscious elaboration of mythical similarities. This place is also called Chandraguptapura and it is believed to have been the home of Jamadagni. There is a large natural cave near the site where a small six-inches-high liṅga is consecrated. The liṅga is covered up with

a metal face. Below it lies a rock shaped like two colossal hips of a women identified as those of Reṇukā, who is said to have hidden here when Paraśurāma pursued her. The outer part of the cave serves as a large *śukanāsi*. The *navaraṅga* appears to be an imitation of the Chalukya style in granite. It is probably of the late Vijayanagar or Pāḷḷegār days. Near the temple inside a cave shrine along with other cult figures an image of Paraśurāma, 2½' high, with *śaṅkha, chakra* and a *kamaṇḍalu* in his left armpit, and wearing a *jaṭā* is also consecrated.[107] Therefore, it is not a shrine particularly dedicated to Paraśurāma; but he is also one of the divinities included in the pantheon, where his mother holds the position of the guardian deity.

A copper plate grant recording the gift of the village Heddase by Prince Mārapa, the younger brother of the Vijayanagar King Harihara I in the possession of Mallarappa, patel of the village Hejje in the Hobali of Chandragutti, suggests that the Śiva temple on the Matangi hills was evidently the temple of Paraśurāma near Hampi.[108] Similarly, at Saundatti, which is a famous cult centre of Reṇukā, there is a solo image of Paraśurāma, representing him as holding a *caudiki* [musical instrument] with both hands, with the *paraśu* and *triśūla* represented on both sides of the image.[109]

At Chiknayakahalli too there is an important temple of Paraśurāma, Reṇukā and Jamadagni. This town is situated northwest of Tumkur town on the Tururekere-Huliyar Road, about 14 km off the Bangalore–Shimoga road. The place derives its name from Chikkanayaka, a chief of the Hagalvadi house. There are at least seven major temples of various deities, including two Anjaneya temples. In Chiknayakahalli temple the village goddess [*grāma-devate*], Hirimāvarada Yeḷḷammā is represented through a wooden figure, which is also known as Reṇukādevī, with a stone head set up in front. The processional image of this temple is a wooden figure of Paraśurāma. To the right of Yeḷḷammā is a seated stone figure, about one feet high, of Jamadagni, with the right hand in the *abhaya mudrā* and the left placed on the thigh. Outside the temple are two small shrines containing round stones said to represent Mātaṅgī and her son Patappa.[110]

An important shrine of Paraśurāma is situated at an old village called Aivalli or Aihole in the Hungund taluk on the Malaprabha river, nearly 22 km south-west of Hungund. Here an axe-shaped rock is shown on the riverbank in commemoration of the legend of Paraśurāma, who is said to have washed his axe on the spot after destroying the whole race of the kshatriyas. On a rock in the river are supposed to be Paraśurāma's footprints. Closeby is a fine temple of Rāmaliṅga. There are temples of Meguti and Durgā also.[111]

Hiremagalur is said to be situated in the *siddha kṣetra* and has been called Bhārgavapuri. Paraśurāma is said to have visited this place, too.[112] On the banks of a large pond there is a Paraśurāma temple. Its *navaraṅga* appears to be of the late Vijayanagar period. The whole temple is made of granite. The *garbhagṛha* [8'x8'] has on a large *pāṇi-baṭlu* a sixteen-sided liṅga [about 2 1/4' high]. On the upper part of the liṅga is a 9" projection, in front, which ends in a square [8"×8"] and looks like a hammer. This is called Paraśurāma and is held to represent his axe. The ceiling has sculptured panels of the Gaṅga times with an inscription. The first panel shows two men cutting perhaps the body of a headless female at her waist. In the second panel are a cow milching a calf and a *liṅga* under a *vimāna*. Nearby lies a slab. A tiger and an anthropoid Gaṇḍabhēruṇḍa are also there side by side, the latter with a sword in hand.[113]

Nanjangud is a town situated on the right bank of the Kabbani river, nearly 21 km south of Mysore. It is now noted for its temple dedicated to Nanjundesvara [Śiva]. Here a temple of small dimensions is said to have existed from time immemorial. The point where a stream called Chūrnavati from the tank runs into the Gundal or Kaundinya river is believed to be the Paraśurāma *kṣetra*, with a temple of Paraśurāma. The moist earth called *mṛttika* is considered an effective application for various skin diseases.[114]

Ramanathapura is another village in Arkalgud taluk, 19.4 km from Arkalgud town and 49.9 km from Hassan town. It is a noted centre of pilgrimage and has been called Dakṣiṇa Kāśī, where there is a pond and seven temples. One of them is called Prasanna Rāmeśvara temple, which is often considered to be an important

temple of this place, consturcted in old Hoysāla style. The car festival of this deity takes place on Vaiśākha śukla tṛtīyā [birthday of Paraśurāma], which suggests that the deity may have been associated with Paraśurāma.[115]

Although Kerala has a strong Paraśurāma tradition and no Sanskrit or Malyalam text of this region fails to mention the role of Paraśurāma in creation of its land, surprisingly there are very few, in fact only a negligible number of shrines dedicated to this cult figure as compared to the other regions as discussed earlier. Another feature of this state is the absence of the Reṇukā cult, which is very popular in other areas of the peninsula. There is only one important shrine of Paraśurāma at Tiruvallam in Kerala, which is nearly 5 km from Thiruvanathapuram. There are several temples inside a small enclosure, one of which belongs to Paraśurāma and there is a pond called Matsyatirtha where, it is said Paraśurāma had performed the *śrāddha* of his father.[116] This temple is still a centre of ancestor worship, where people from different corners come to perform *srāddha* of their ancestors.

Architecturally, the Paraśurāma temple complex at Tiruvallam is said to be the meeting ground of both the Kerala and the Draviḍa style. Within the inner enclosure stand the shrines dedicated to Paraśurāmēśvara, Brahmā and Śiva, apart from the one meant to enshrine Matsyamūrti, Vedavyāsa and Subrahmaṇya. On the eastern side, there are shrines of Kṛṣṇa, Mahā-Gaṇapati and Sāstā. Of these shrines, the one dedicated to Paraśurāma, Brahmā and Matsyamūrti are in the Draviḍa style. The interior of the shrine is divided into a circular *garbha-gṛiha*, with the standing image of Paraśurāma, and narrower *mukha-maṇḍapa*, which projects out of the sanctum. It is a *nirandhāra* shrine without a *pradakṣiṇā-patha* inside. In the front of the temple stands the *namaskāra-maṇḍapa*, with a pyramidal roof. There are two *dhvaja-stambhas* outside the inner *prākāra*, one for the Śiva and the other for the Paraśurāma shrine.[117]

The temples of this complex are generally dated between the 13th and 17th centuries. Inscriptions on the *adhiṣṭhānas* range in dates from Kollam 399 [CE1224] to 412 [CE1237]. These

inscriptions come mostly from the Brahmā shrine, and the earliest of them, belonging to the reign of the Veṇāḍu ruler Vīra Keraḷavermana, refers to the gods Mahādeva, Tirukkaṇṇappar and Gaṇapati. H. Sarkar has proposed that in all likelyhood the Paraśurāma shrine, came afterwards, perhaps in the late 17th century, as its stylistic feature exhibits.[118] Even K.R. Srinivasan views that the Paraśurāma shrine, with a stone body and brickwork super structure is an example of *dvitala* and *tritala vimānas* of *vṛitta* or circular plan of the 16th century and later.[119] However, some other authorities have dated the Paraśurāma shrine to the 13th century.[120]

Trichur has a small shrine of Paraśurāma in the Vadakkunnathar temple complex, which is a 12th-century temple in Kerala style of architecture. This complex has many lesser shrines for subsidiary deities, such as Kṛṣṇa, Nandi and Sāstā, apart from that of Paraśurāma.[121] A small Paraśurāma shrine is located at village Valamarudur also in Tirur taluk in the Malappuram district of Kerala.[122]

Maharashtra is one of the most important areas where three Paraśurāma temples are located at Chiplun, Trayambkeshvar and Dhavadasi. Chiplun is one of the few Paraśurāma-related sites where his cult and status of guardian deity is still extant. In the Ratnagiri district of Maharastra, this temple is located in the village Pedhe, which is around 9 km from Chiplun town. The village itself is situated on the top of a hill and in the middle of this village, there is a magnificent temple of Paraśurāma which is well known in the entire Konkan region of the western coast. This area is also known as Paraśurāma *kṣetra.*

The origin of this temple is not certain, but it is believed that a Kunbi family named Pankars noticed this sacred spot nearly six hundred years ago. Paraśurāma is said to have declared this place as Mahendra mountain and decided to reside here permanently.[123] This temple is a symbol of religious harmony and integration. The Vijapur Adilshah, a Muslim, funded the construction of two domes on the temple and awarded land grants in the 15th century, which continues even today. The third dome was added by the daughter

of the Siddi of Janjira. Her husband was lost at sea, then on the advice of Brahmendra Swami, who was the guru of Chhatrapati Sahu and his Peshwa Bajirao Balaji, she invoked Lord Paraśurāma. Her husband returned from the high seas. She then built this dome, and made a grant for the 'chaughada' or playing of the drums.[124]

According to some Marathi chroniclers, Shivaji had visited the temple before 1674 when he was crowned monarch and he made a grant for the regular expenses of the temple.[125] The temple was renovated and expanded through the efforts of Brahmendra Swami in 1709. This temple enjoyed various land grants and a special tax locally known as *Bhārgavapaṭṭi*, which was later annulled under the British rule.[126] These images were installed in the temple in 1779 CE. Before the images were installed, a rock was worshipped on the same spot as a *swayambhū* image of the god.[127]

The *garbagṛha* of the temple has three idols. The central one is that of Paraśurāma and to his right is that of Kāla and to his left is Kāma. All are four-armed images and carry their weapons with them. Iconographically, the central image is more important, whose lower right hand is in *abhaya mudrā*, the upper right hand carries an arrow, the upper left hand a bow and the lower left a battle axe or *paraśu*.[128] The image of Kāla, Kāma and Paraśurāma perhaps symbolise Maheśa, Brahmā and Viṣṇu.[129] The architecture of the temple is very simple. It is a large rectangular enclosure surrounded by brick and stone walls pierced by arched gateways. The eastern gateway is the biggest and a drum house, i.e. *naqqārakhānā* surmounts it. The plan is formed by a *sabhāmaṇḍapa*, a central *maṇḍapa* and a *grabhagṛha* which is quite dark.[130]

"The most significant feature of this temple complex is the unique shape of the domes with plain moulding at the base. The octagonal sloping form and very high *kalaśa* along with the interior of domes, carving and decoration clearly shows the Adilshahi influence. Even the stone arches and the construction of the outer wall show this mixture of styles. The local laterite stone and local wooden craftsmanship also have their impact on the architecture. The woodwork and the carvings on the Reṇukā temple complex show local craftsmanship at its best and displays a strong sense of

harmony with the surroundings. The tile roofs, the red laterite walls and the paving induce a feeling of visual unity through colours. The Gaṇapati shrine in the temple complex is decorated during the festival and a typical *makhar* or arrangement for display of images is fabricated. This *makhar* is also a good example of local craftsmanship and rural aesthetic concepts expressed in paints, coloured paper, and wooden panels. The temple complex with the Banaganga tank, Ganga shrine and Gaṇapati temple all approached by paved laterite paths still present a well-preserved picture of 17th century Konkan architecture."[131]

On the way to the temple there is also a small temple of Reṇukā. There is a water spring in the vicinity of this temple. In the way ahead on the top of the hill there is a small temple of Dattātreya.[132] The main celebration here is on the birthday of Paraśurāma on *Akṣaya tṛtīyā*, or the third day of the new moon in the month of Vaiśākha or April–May, beginning on the new moon it continues for three days.[133]

Another temple of Paraśurāma is located at Dhavadasi village, which is situated on the Bangalore–Pune railway line, nearly 10 km from Satara Road station. This was constructed by saint Brahmendra Swami, whose *samādhi* is also situated here. There is a pond near this temple, which was also constructed by Brahmendra Swami.[134]

Trayambakeshvara is nearly 30 km from Nasik, situated at the foot of a hill. Although the main temple belongs to Lord Trayambakesvara associated with Śiva, in the town there is a temple of Paraśurāma among several other temples.[135]

In Rajasthan, at least two shrines of Paraśurāma could be located. The first is recorded to have been at Rajpura, Desuri town, which is nearly 27 km west of Bali. Rajapura is a village situated at the foot of a hill. Near this village, on a hillock, is a cave dedicated to Paraśurāma. This site used to be one of natural scenic beauty at one point of time.[136]

Another temple in Rajasthan is at Kojra, nearly 17 km northeast of Nitora. This temple has been reported by V.S. Sukthankar, who was Officiating Assistant Superintendent of ASI, Western Circle.

His account is a typical example of the gap between perception about a shrine from above and that from below. This also reflects how, over a period of time, small cults lose their identity and get absorbed in bigger cults. The report says, "In the middle of the village stands a temple of Viṣṇu, locally known as Paraśurāma, which is highly popular with the Kumbhars [potters]. We were in fact told by a local Bhāṭ that the temple was built in V. 900 by a Kumbhar. Although the chronicles may be right as regards the caste of the builder of the temple, the style of the architecture doesn't support the claim to the alleged antiquity. I was interested to know what sort of image they make of Paraśurāma and so visited the temple early in the morning order to inspect the god because that is the only occasion on which the image is undraped. It was disappointing to find that the so-called Paraśurāma was none other than the four-armed Viṣṇu–Chaturbhuja."[137]

A similar kind of observation comes from another report of ASI, Western Circle, which raises the question that as far as religious faith is concerned, is iconography more important or people's belief. The report says: "Similar excavation made near the inner gate of the eastern entrance of the fort of Mandsaur resulted in the unearthing of a colossal statue of, according to people, Paraśurāma. But without doubt it is an image of Śiva. His right hand is broken off and his left holds a trident with an axe attached to it. It is this axe which has lead people to suppose it to be an image of Paraśurāma, and on the other hand, instances are not wanting of an axe being wielded by Śiva. But the coil of serpents on his shoulders settle the point and unmistakably indicate that it is a figure of Śiva."[138] While technically it is correct to attribute this figure to Śiva, people's faith in accepting it as Paraśurāma is equally important for the historian of religions.

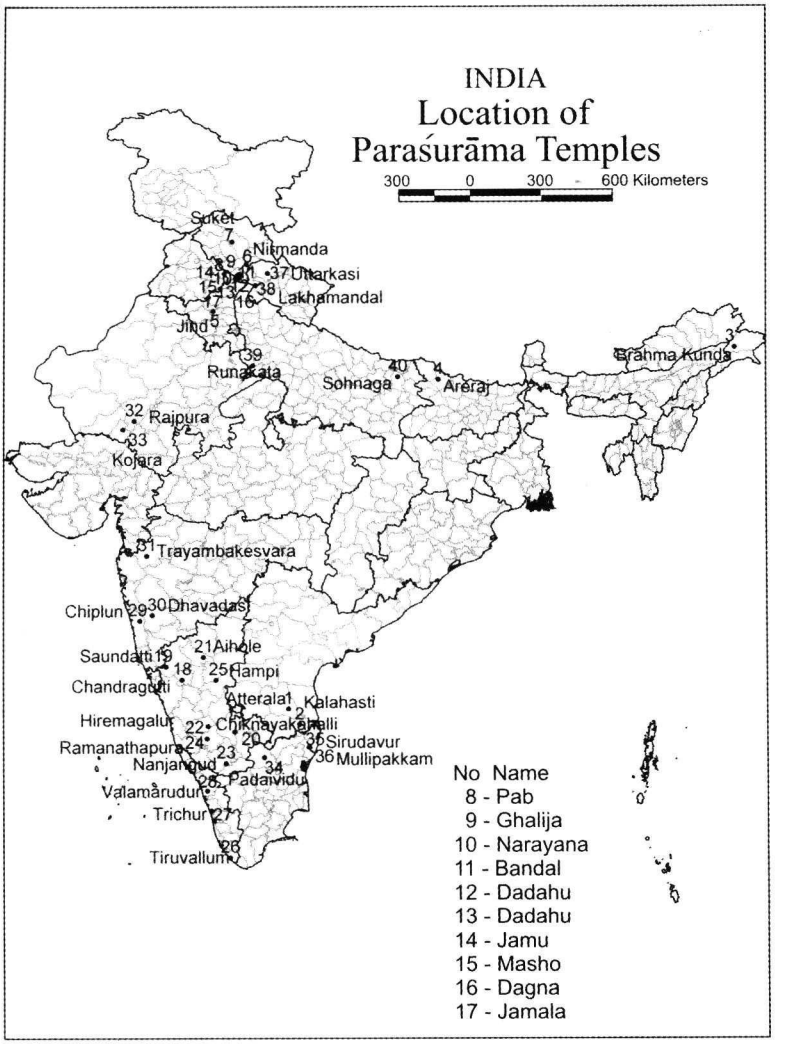
In Tamil Nadu, one does not find any major temple of Paraśurāma but he is not completely absent either. For example, at Padaividu in the North Arcot district, the temple of Reṇukāmbal contains in the niches not only the figure of Reṇukā but also of Paraśurāma and Jamadagni. Moreover, there are a few bronzes of Paraśurāma in the temple as well, which show him with two hands

holding the bow and arrow. In another niche of the temple, the figure of Reṇukā and Paraśurāma is represented, which depicts Reṇukā putting *tilak* on the forehead of Paraśurāma. Paraśurāma is seen standing with folded hands with a bow on his right shoulder. This panel cannot be dated before the 15th century.[139]

Sirudavur in Chingleput district presents a very significant example of the takeover of Paraśurāma shrines by other deities. This place has an early temple of Viṣṇu, which dates from the period of Āditya II Karikāla, whose inscriptions are among those found in the temple. In the inscriptions of the Cōḷas, both Āditya II and Rājarāja I as well as others, this temple is called Paraśurāma Viṇṇagrāma. The name indicates that this temple was probably dedicated to Paraśurāma and, therefore, it represents an instance of early Paraśurāma temples being replaced by that of Viṣṇu.[140]

The Census of India Temple Survey reports another Paraśurāma Eswaraswamy temple in Chingleput Taluk at Mullipakkam. The village Mullipakkam is 15 km from Chingleput railway station and 10 km from Thirukkali Kundaram. This temple was built about 270 years ago. It has immovable properties in the shape of 19.39 acres of wet and dry land. Pooja is performed by the hereditary Gurukkal. No festival is celebrated here and it is managed by a trustee.[141]

The newly formed state of Uttaranchal also has two important shrines of Paraśurāma. The first one is at Uttarkashi, which is a famous centre of pilgrimage, next only to Gangotri in importance. Although the most important temple here is dedicated to Śiva, there are other important temples in the town which are dedicated to Paraśurāma, Dattātreya, Annapūrṇā, Bhairava and Ekādaśarudra.[142] The second one, situated at Lakhamandal, pargana Jaunsar Bawar, tehsil Chakrata, in district Dehradun is a very important shrine. Lakhamandal village is located on the bank of the Yamuna at an elevation of 1,110.36 mt. above the sea level. It is at a distance of about 35 km from Chakrata and about 128 km from Dehradun. It lies on the extreme edge of the district and, prior to British occupation, was claimed by both the states of Sirmaur and Garhwal. It contains temples dedicated to Śiva, the five Pāṇḍava brothers


INDIA
Location of
Paraśurāma Temples
300 0 300 600 Kilometers
Suket
Nirmanda
Uttarkasi
Lakhamandal
Jind
Runakata
Sohnaga
Areraj
Brahma Kunda
Raipura
Kojara
Trayambakesvara
Chiplun
Dhavada
Saundatti
Aihole
Hampi
Chandragutti
Atterala
Kalahasti
Hiremagalur
Chiknayakanhalli
Ramanathapuram
Sirudavur
Mullipakkam
Nanjanad
Padaividu
Valamarudur
Trichur
Tiruvallum
No Name
8 - Pab
9 - Ghalija
10 - Narayana
11 - Bandal
12 - Dadahu
13 - Dadahu
14 - Jamu
15 - Masho
16 - Dagna
17 - Jamala

and Kedār, apart from that of Paraśurāma.[143] In fact, its contiguity with Sirmaur makes the pattern of the spread of Paraśurāma shrines in the region more apparent.

As early as 1911, H.G. Walton had noted: "In Jaunsar, Dehradun, the orthodox worshippers of the five great gods are few. The great majority of people revere Mahāsu or Paraśurāma, the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu. A famous temple to this latter deity exists at Lakhamandal. To the east of the Pargana the Snake is adored. Mahāsu, however is the great god of the pargana and deserves a detailed notice."[144] On the basis of scanty data, it is difficult to ascertain the nature of relationship between Mahāsu and Paraśurāma and or to decide whether it represents the tribalisation of Paraśurāma or brahmanisation of Mahāsu.

Uttar Pradesh also has at least two shrines dedicated to Paraśurāma. The first one is at Runakata village in Kiraoli tehsil. This village is situated on the Agra–Mathura highway, nearly 17 km from Mathura. The Yamuna flows in the northern part of the village. It is believed that originally the name of this village was 'Ruṇḍa Kaṭā', meaning 'slaughtered torso'. Legend has it that it is the birthplace of Paraśurāma, who at the behest of his father, put to death his mother and brothers, setting an example in filial obedience. This place is taken to be a Reṇukā *kṣetra*. It is said that the sage Jamadagni had an ashram at this place. On a nearby high mound there is also a temple of Jamadagni in which images of both Reṇukā and Jamadagni are consecrated. Down the mound there are temples of Paraśurāma and Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa. There is also a Trideva temple at this place. On the occasion of *Ganga Dussehra*, *Paraśurāma jayanti* and *Somāvati amāvāsya*, fairs are organised. Here the place around the Reṇukā temple has been developed into a picturesque site. It is said that the great bhakti poet Sūradāsa lived for a long time in the Reṇukā temple of the village. It is also believed that it was his birthplace, where he composed his early poetry.[145]

The Annual Report of the Director General of Archaeology for the year 1906–07 mentions a photograph of various deities in the Paraśurāma temple at Sohnag near Gorakhpur. Apart from an

image of Paraśurāma, three images of Viṣṇu and one of Brahmā is reported. No further details could be gathered of this temple.[146]

This brief survey brings forth the archaeological and literary evidence related to the several *tīrthas* and *kṣetras* of Paraśurāma. It also shows that Paraśurāma was not mere a mythical sage of the epic and Purāṇas; rather, he had a cultic presence in several parts of the Indian subcontinent. His cultic footprint is more pronounced outside the Ganga plain as compared to the bastion of brahmanical orthodoxy. The survey also shows that as all other religious symbols *tīrthas* too keep changing their meaning and exhibit transformation over time.

Footnotes

1 For the ritual significance of crossroads, see D.D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 82–109.

2 D.L. Eck, "India's Tīrthas: Crossings in Sacred Geography", *History of Religions*, XX,1981, p. 328; David E.Sopher, "The Message of Place in Hindu Pilgrimage", *National Geographic Journal of India*, XXXIII, IV, pp353–69; H.T. Bakker, ed. *The History of Sacred Places in India as Reflected in the Traditional Literature*, Leiden, 1990, Quoted in Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*, 2001, p.133.

3 Cf. R.N.Nandi, *Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India*; Hermann Kulke, *Kings and Cults : State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*.

4 Vijay Nath, op.cit. p.126; idem, "Tīrthas and Acculturation: An Anthropological Study", *Social Science Probings*, vol.10, no. 1–4 March-December, 1993 pp.28–29.

5 Kālidāsa, *Meghdūta*, 57; Raghuvaṃśa IV. 52, 58.

6 Pradeep Kant Choudhary, "Archaeology and Religion", Proceedings of the Third Annual Session of ASHA held at Calcutta, 1999, [Forthcoming].

7 However, Jarl Charpentier has noted that the *Mahābhārata* refers that Paraśurāma intimidated the sea god by shooting an arrow across it, but it could not be located. cf. Jarl Charpentier, "Paraśurāma", *Kuppuswami Shastri Commemoration Volume*, 1937, pp.9–16.

8 Jarl Charpentier, op.cit., pp.13–14; K.M.Munshi, "The Mahiṣmatī of Kārtavīrya, *The IA*, November 1922, p.220.

9 *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, IX. 16. 26.

[10] *Brahma Purāṇa*, 104. 115–116. The location of Mahendra mountain has also been the subject of much speculation. But most of the scholars believe that it can be identified with the mountain range on the eastern coast, because it is also supposed to be related with the construction of golden altar on river Vaitaraṇī for the performance of horse sacrifice by Paraśurāma.Jarl Charpentier, op.cit. pp. 11–12.

[11] *Padma Purāṇa*, VI.242. 177–185.

[12] *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.57 and 58.

[13] Quoted in T.S. Rukmini, "Folk traditions Related to the *Mahābhārata* in South India", in K.S.Singh, ed. *The Mahābhārata in the Tribal and Folk Tradition of India*, p–195.

[14] *Nārada Purāṇa*, Uttarabhāga, 74. 2. 1–41.

[15] Kumari S.S. Janaki, "Paraśurāma", *Purāṇa*, VIII, No.1, Jan 1966, p. 62.

[16] Ibid. p. 63.

[17] Ibid pp. 63–64.

[18] Ibid. pp.68–69.

[19] Nagendra Rao, T*he Historical Tradition of South Canara and the Brahmanical Groups: A Study of Grāmapaddhatī and Sahyādri Khaṇḍa*, Unpublished M.Phil.Dissertation, Mangalore University, 1995, pp.21–22.

[20] Nagendra Rao, op.cit., pp. 29–31.

[21] A comaparative study of these two versions may have been very rewarding, but the same could not be undertaken due to my inability to handle Kannada language.

[22] Some scholars believe that *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa* is not more than three hundred years old, *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, Vol. I Part II, 1896, pp.26–27.

[23] J.Gerson Da Cunha, *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa- Skanda Purāṇānāntargata*, pp.325–26, in Nagendra Rao, op.cit., p. 157.

[24] B.A.Saletore, *Ancient Karnataka*, p.38..

[25] J. Gerson Da Cunha, op.cit., p. 331.

[26] Gopal Raghunath Nandargikar, *The Raghuvaṃśa of Kālidāsa*, IV. 53,58.

[27] In this context it should be underlined that even *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* may be considered a later Purāṇa, although P.V. Kane and R.C. Hazra both place *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* in the time bracket of CE 300 and CE 500 along with *Vāyu* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇas* and consider it one of the earliest Purāṇa. In fact, R.C. Hazara argued that *Vāyu Purāṇa and Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* were originally one and separated sometimes after CE 325. But the suggestion given by G.V. Tagare seems more plausible that while the musical portion of *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* may belong to CE 400–600, the chapters on Paraśurāma legends should be placed between CE 700 and 1000. Because this portion shows strong influence of tantric stream of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult [8th century]

and most of the contents of this Purāṇa is recorded in *Nārada Purāṇa* [11th century]. Cf. P.V.Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra, Viṣṇu*, II, p. 852; R.C.Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, p.174–75; G.V. Tagare, *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, p. IX, [Introduction].

[28] Nallāḷ Plate of Gaṅga king Durvinita, CE 522–3; MAR, 1924, p.71.

[29] R. Champakalaksmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in Tamil Country*, p.114.

[30] J. Charpentier, "Paraśurāma", *Kuppuswami Shastri Commemoration Volume*, 1937, p.13.

[31] B.A. Saletore, in his pioneering study on the ancient Karnataka had long ago proposed the idea that occurrences of Paraśurāma tradition in different regions of India were linked to migration from Gujarat to other parts of west coast, particularly South Kanara and Kerala, B.A. Saletore, *Ancient Karnataka*, I, History of Tuḷuva pp.23–30.

[32] Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala*, p.4.

[33] *Karnataka State Gazetteer*, South Canara District, 1973, p 33.

[34] J. Charpentier, op.cit., p.15.

[35] K.P.Padmanabha Menon, "Discursive Notes on Mālābār and its Place Names", *IA*, August 1902, pp. 338–350.

[36] H. Sarkar, *Architectural Survey of Temples of Kerala*, pp. 15–16.

[37] M.S. Krisnan, *Geology of India and Burma*, p. 531, in H. Sarkar, Ibid.

[38] T.A. Gopinath Rao, "Jaina and Baudha Vestiges in Travancore", *Travancore Archaeology Series*, Trivendrum, 1919, pp.121–123 in H.Sarkar Ibid.

[39] K.P. Padmanabha Menon, op.cit. pp.338–340.

[40] K.V. Ramesh, *History of South Canara*, p. XXIII.

[41] *Kalyāṇa*, Tirthāṅka, pp. 316–323.

[42] *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteer*, Chittoor District, 1979, p. 202–203.

[43] *Kālikā Purāṇa*, 81. 35–36, in Swami Banagovinda Parampanthi, "Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa: A Study in Historical and Geographical Perspective', *Journal of Assam Research Society*, 19, 1970–71, pp. 77–79.

[44] Swami Banagovinda Parampanthi, *Bhagwan Parasurāma*, p. 75.

[45] *Mahābhārata*, CE 3.82.2, GP 3.85 .2 p. 1202.

[46] Kālidāsa, *Meghadūta*, 57.

[47] *Padma Purāṇa* 1.55.36–53.

[48] *Kālikā Purāṇa* 82. 23–40.

[49] M.C. Behera, *Pilgrimage Centre Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa*, p.11.

[50] Swami Bangovinda Parampanthi, *Bhagawan Parasurāma*, p.75.

[51] M.C. Behera,op.cit. p. 12.

[52] Swami Banagovinda Parampanthi, op.cit. p. 78.

[53] M.C. Behera, op.cit., p. 18.

[54] Ibid.p.19.

[55] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, XVI, 1908, p.26; *Rajasthan District Gazetteer*, Chittaurgarh District, 1977, p. 406.

[56] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.278.

[57] *Kalyāṇa*,Tīrthāṅka, p.300.

[58] *Andhra Pradesh State Gazetteer*, Cuddapah District, 1971, pp. 728–29; *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.346.

[59] L.Rice, *Mysore Gazetteer*, II, p.485.

[60] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, XIV, p.203.

[61] *Gazetteer of Bambay*, Ratnagiri, X, p.326.

[62] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.118.

[63] *Mahābhārata*, CE 1.1.10,GP 1.1.12, p.2.

[64] *Mahābhārata*, CE 1.2.4, GP, 1.2.1–11, pp. 23–24.

[65] V.S.Sukthankar. Epic Studies VI, pp.5–6.

[66] Supra, Chapter Three, Kshatriya annihilation myth.

[67] *Mahābhārata*, CE 3.81.22, GP. 3.83.24–43,pp. 1182–83.

[68] Ibid. CE. 3.129.6–7, 3. 129.6–7, p. 1308.

[69] *Padma Purāṇa*, III. 26. 20–39.

[70] *Nārada Purāṇa*, Uttarabhāga, 64.12–17.

[71] *Nārada Purāṇa*, Uttarabhāga, 64.12.

[72] *Vāmana Purāṇa*, 22.59–60.

[73] *Mahābhārata* CE. 3.83.2, GP. 3. 85.2 p. 1202.

[74] Ibid.CE. 3.83. 14, GP. 3.85. 16, p. 1203.

[75] Ibid.CE.3.83.40, 3.86.9 GP. 3.85.43, 3. 88.12 p.1205, 1214.

[76] Ibid CE.3. 81.139., GP. 3.82. 82, p. 1178.

[77] Ibid CE. 3.88.13, 3.88.16, GP. 3.90. 16, 18, 1217, 18.

[78] Ibid CE. 3.88.20, 13. 26.17 GP. 3.90.23 p.1218, 5560.

[79] Ibid CE. 3.130.12–13, GP.3. 130. 12–13p. 1310.

[80] Ibid CE.13.26.44, GP13. 25. 47–50, p.5562.

[81] Ibid CE. 12. 122.3–4, GP 12.122. 3–4, p.4736.

[82] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.84.

[83] Ibid. p.86.

[84] Temples and shrines have been located in modern Indian States, which are being discussed here in an alphabetical order.

[85] *ASI, Southern Circle, Annual Report*, 1912–13, pp.64–65.

[86] *Andhra Pradesh State Gazetteer*, Cuddapah District, 1967, pp. 728–29.

[87] *Andhra Pradesh State Gazetteer*, Chittor District, 1979, p.205.

[88] *List of Ancient Monuments Selected for Conservation in the Madras Presidency*, April, 1917, p.17; Epigraphia Indica, XI, p.222.

[89] M.C. Behera, op.cit. pp.42–43.

[90] Ibid.p. 43.

[91] *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Bengal Circle, 1900–1901.

[92] A.B.L. Awasthi, *Studies in Skanda Purāṇa*, IV, Brahmanical Art and Iconography, p.134.

[93] K.B. Dave, *Gujaratnu Murti Vidhana*, pp. 203–209, cited in Kalpana S. Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p.113.

[94] *Haryana District Gazetteer*, Jind District, 1986, pp. 42, 258.

[95] S.L. Nagar, *Temples of Himachal Pradesh*, pp. 177–179, plate no. 147.

[96] Infra, Chapter Six.

[97] *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III. p. 286, cited in *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, XIX, 1908, p.124.

[98] *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, Lahore, Vol. VI. pp. 52 and 70–72. cited in *Himachal District Gazetteer*, Lahul and Spiti, 1975, p. 40.

[99] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p. 73, S.L. Nagar, op.cit. pp. 177–179.

[100] *ASI Northern Circle Report*, Punjab, 1910–11, List of Photograph, Annual no.43,44, Serial no. 1190, 1191.

[101] *Census of India*, 1971, Series 7, Himachal Pradesh, Sirmur District Part A and B, Town and Village Directory.

[102] S.L. Nagar. op.cit. p. 212.

[103] *Census of India*, 1971, series 7, Himachal Pradesh, Sirmur District, Part A and B, Town and Village Directory.

[104] S.L.Nagar, *Temples of Himachal Pradesh*, p.212.

[105] *Himachal District Gazeteer*, Sirmur District, 1965/1969 pp. 326–27.

[106] S.L.Nagar, op.cit. p. 208

[107] *Archaeological Survey of Mysore*, Annual Report, 1931, pp.54–56.

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[111] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, V.p.129; *The Indian Antiquary*, V. p. 67, VIII, p.237, IX, p. 99; *EI*, VI, p.1.

[112] L. Rice, *Mysore Gazetteer*, p. 378.

[113] *Archaeological Survey of Mysore*, Annual Report, 1931, p.23.

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[115] *Karnataka State Gazetteer*, Hassan District, 1971, pp. 654, 872.

[116] *Kalyāṇa,* Tīrthāṅka, p. 395.

[117] H. Sarkar, *Architectural Survey of Temples of Kerala*, ASI, 1978, p. 253–255.

[118] Ibid. p. 253–255.

[119] K.R. Srinivasan, *Temples of South India*, New Delhi, 1971, p.190.

[120] *Travancore Archaeology Report*, 1951–52, Plate, XII, 30.

[121] K.R. Srinivasan, op.cit., p.186.

[122] I am thankful to Kesavan Valuthat for this information.

[123] Gopal Krishna Kanhere, *The Temples of Maharashtra*, p. 23.

[124] Ibid. pp. 23–24.

[125] M.S. Mate, *Temples and Legends of Maharashtra*, p.114.

[126] Ibid. p.116.

[127] Ibid. p.113.

[128] Ibid.p.113.

[129] Gopal Krishna Kanhere, op.cit. p. 24.

[130] M.S. Mate, op.cit. p.112.

[131] Gopal Krishna Kanhere, op.cit. pp. 23–24.

[132] *Kalyāṇa,* Tīrthāṅka, p. 249.

[133] Infra, Chapter Five.

[134] *Kalyāṇa,* Tīrthāṅka, p.255.

[135] *Kalyāṇa,* Tīrthāṅka, p. 247.

[136] *Preliminary List of Antiquarian Remains in Marwar*, Date not mentioned.

[137] *ASI, Western Circle, Annual Report*, 1917, p.62.

[138] *ASI, Western Circle, Annual Report*, 1905, p.63.

[139] R.Champakalakshmi, op.cit. p.115.

[140] Ibid. p.115.

[141] *Census of India*, 1961, vol. IX, Part XI-D, Chengleput Taluk p. 87.

[142] *U.P. District Gazetteer*, Uttarkashi District, 1979, p.154.

[143] *U.P. District Gazetteer*, Dehradun District, 1979, p. 335.

[144] H.G. Walton, *Dehradun: A Gazetteer*, 1911, pp.90–95.

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Chapter 6

Dimensions of the Cult

In the preceding chapter, an attempt was made to underline the presence of Paraśurāma as a cult figure in many parts of India through the survey of his *tīrthas* and shrines. In this chapter, the same exercise is being continued through the study of rituals and other dimensions of his cultic manifestations. However, it should be stated in the beginning that the cult of Paraśurāma is not presented here as an insular sect having an exclusive group of devotees dedicated to Paraśurāma alone. The worshippers of Paraśurāma were equally dedicated to other deities of Sanskritic and local traditions. Therefore, an effort is made in this chapter to underline his presence as a cultic entity in various systems of Puranic religion. Moreover, it is difficult at this level of historical knowledge to talk about any distinct ritual of the Paraśurāma cult. Even if his cult carried some exclusive rituals at one point of time, they are lost now in historical and anthropological records. Significantly, historical sources throw very little light on the ritualistic aspect of this cult. But, ethnological studies show that he shared his rituals with all other brahmanic deities. Therefore, one can identify only some footprints and not the entire trajectory of the Paraśurāma cult.

1. Rituals and Sacred Performances

Vratas

Vratas constituted an integral part of Puranic ritualism and they received considerable attention from the composers of the Purāṇas. Observance of *vratas* or vows of abstinence, particularly from food for a stipulated period of time, was considered superior even to sacrifice. Some of the Purāṇas give us information about *vratas* observed in the name of Paraśurāma. In fact, descriptions of *vratas* are among the very few rituals related to Paraśurāma, of which one is informed through historical sources. However, these descriptions are a part of the Vaiṣṇava *vratas* and do not exist as separate rituals to propitiate Paraśurāma.

The *Padma Purāṇa*, which gives details of various kinds of *vratas* says that on the occasion of *Āmalakī Ekādaśī*, one should stay awake all night near an *āṅwalā* tree and should pass the entire night by means of listening to or reciting accounts of the deeds of Viṣṇu. Then the observer of the *vrata* should go around the tree repeating Viṣṇu's name all the while. In the morning, having waved a light in front of the image of Viṣṇu, and having honoured a brahman, the observer should make an offering to Viṣṇu saying, "In the *Jāmadagnya ghata* there are a couple of garments and two sandals. May Keśava, in the form of Jāmadagnya, be pleased with me." Then the observer should go around the *Āmalaki* [tree] while touching it. Having then bathed duly, the observer should feed brahmans. Then surrounded by his fraternity he should eat himself."[1]

The *Varāha Purāṇa*[2] gives a detailed account of the *Jāmadagnya Dvādaśīvrata* which is described by Dhruva. The narrative of this *vrata* is part of a long series describing various other *vratas* related to Viṣṇu avatāras, such as *Matsyadvādaśī, Kūrmadvādaśī, Vārahadvādaśī, Narasiṃhadvādaśī, Vāmanadvādaśī, Kṛṣṇadvādaśī, Buddhadvādaśī, Kalkidvādaśī, Padmanābhadvādaśī, Dharaṇidvādaśī.* They represent *vratas* for all the twelve months round the year from Margaśīrṣa onwards.

The *Varāha Purāṇa* says that in the month of Vaiśākha [*Vṛṣabha*], one should perform *saṅkalpa* on the *dvādaśī* day and, after bathing in mud, should go to the place of worship. There he should worship Viṣṇu in the following manner: The feet should be worshipped as Jāmadagnya, belly as Sarvadhārin, waist as Madhusūdana, thighs as Śrivatsadhārin, hands as Kṣarāntaka, the beard as Śitikaṇṭha, the conch and disc by their own names [Pāñchajanya and Sudarśana] and the head as Brahmāṇḍadhārin. After worshipping thus, the observer should place a pot in front and put on it a pair of clothes. A golden image of Jāmadagnya [Paraśurāma] having an axe in the right hand, should be put in a vessel and then placed on it. Worship should then be done with sandal and flour of various kinds. Keeping awake the whole night with devotion, it should be given to a brahmana early in the morning the next day. Then the result accruing from this *vrata* is narrated. For example, it is said that one who observes it will get a good son, and will have prosperity and resplendence in this life. In the world beyond, he remains in the world of Brahmā for one *kalpa* attended by numerous *apsaras*. Then he will be reborn as an emperor and live for thirty thousand *kalpa*. It should be noted that every deity to whom the *vrata* is devoted is called Viṣṇu's feet in all the descriptions, the only exceptions being Buddha and Kṛṣṇa. Every chapter has details of the method of worship, the *vrata* story and *phalaśruti* or gains from the *vrata*. Apart from that, the golden image is asked for in all the *vratas*.

In the description of *Kalki Dvādaśī vrata*, which is again a dialogue between the king and Nara, the Nara said, "One may worship Narasiṃha for ridding oneself of sins, Vāmana for removing all stupefaction, Paraśurāma for wealth, Rāma for begetting sons, Buddha for physical charm and Kalkin for victory."[3]

A wide range of *vratas* are also discussed in the *Nārada Purāṇa* but in the section related to *Daśāvatāra Vrata* Paraśurāma is not mentioned any where, not even on the *Vaiśākha śukla tṛtīyā*. However, at one place it describes the holy rites to be observed on the tenth day in the bright half of the month of Bhādrapada and says: "O excellent brahman, the holy rites called *daśāvatāra* [the

ten incarnations] is to be observed. After taking bath in a water reservoir, i.e. a river and the rites of *tarpaṇa* to the devas, sages and *pitṛ*, he should, with great concentration, worship ten incarnations viz. Matsya, Kūrma, Vāraha, Narasiṃha, Trivikrama, Paraśurāma, Śri Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalki. O Nārada, he should worship ten gold images of these incarnations in accordance with the injunctions. He should then give *dāna* to ten excellent brahman after duly honouring them and feed those brahmans. One who does these, will go to *Viṣṇuloka*".[4]

Śrāddha

There seems to be a close relationship between the Paraśurāma cult and *śrāddha* rituals. As we have argued in earlier chapters, there are hints in the textual references that the legend of Paraśurāma as an ideal performer of *śrāddha* rituals was perpetuated by brahmans of north India. He provided a role model for kshatriyas as one taking revenge for his father's killing and then performing oblation to the manes and donating the entire earth to brahmans. In the *Mahābhārata*, such narratives as *Paraśurāma–Vasiṣṭha saṃvāda*[5] on the greatness of the donation of gold and *Indra-Bṛhaspati saṃvāda*[6] on the donation of land by Paraśurāma, are quite remarkable. In fact, the latter says in so many words that "those brahmanas who recite this saga sung by earth on the occasion of the *śrāddha* ceremony will be able to claim the absolute state of *brahmabhāva*." The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*[7] says that Paraśurāma not only performed such rituals at Samantapañchaka but also visited Gayā and Chandrapāda. In the Tīrthayātrāparva[8] of the *Mahābhārata*, Pulastya narrates the religious efficacy of performing *tarpaṇa* to the manes at Rāmahṛda. It is noteworthy that Kurukṣetra or Samantapañchaka is still famous for the *śrāddha* and *piṇḍadāna* rituals. There are some other *tīrthas* that are also related to Paraśurāma in Haryana and Rajasthan, where people perform their *śrāddha* rituals. For example, the Kundin village situated on the right bank of the river Banas is an important example of such a *tīrtha*, which is associated with the legend of Paraśurāma. About 6 km from Rashmi tehsil in this village there is an ancient *tīrtha* called Matri Kuṇḍin, which is famous for

śrāddha ceremonies and the immersion of last remains.[9] In recent times similar rites have become popular at Paraśurāma kuṇḍa in Arunachal Pradesh also, where people from as far as Rajasthan and Nepal come to perform the *śrāddha* of their ancestors.[10] Therefore, some of the present-day *tīrthas* show the link between *śrāddha* rituals and the cult of Paraśurāma. In the Konkan region, on the occasion of Vaiśākha *śukla tṛtīya* not only is Paraśurāma *jayantī* celebrated but cold water and a winnowing fan is distributed in order to appease ancestors.[11]

Bhuṇḍā

Unlike *vratas* and *śrāddha* rituals, *bhuṇḍā* is not reported by any of the Vedic or Puranic texts. But it is a kind of Vedic sacrifice, which was given great importance by the brahmanic community of Himachal Pradesh for a very long time. Paraśurāma has been closely associated with the *bhuṇḍā* sacrifice performed in Nirmanda of the Nurpur Valley on the Sutluj. This sacrifice is addressed to Śiva, Śakti and Paraśurāma, in whose honour it is supposed to be organised every 12th year. However, it was only at Nirmanda that this sacrifice is held after a fixed duration, elsewhere it was held whenever enough money and resources were available. At Nirmanda it was held in the same year as the *kumbha* fair on the Ganga, i.e. once in 12 years. After *bhuṇḍā*, some related sacrifices take place every three years. For example, *Bharoji jag* is organised after first three years of the *bhuṇḍā*, then after the next three years *Bhatpur jag* occurs and again after three years, the *śānd jag* is held. Although these three are also attended by several *deotas*, but they are much less important than the *bhuṇḍā*. The *bhuṇḍā* at Nirmanda has become quite irregular now and after 1981 it had not taken place till 1999. Paraśurāma is associated in many ways with this sacrifice. According to a local legend, Jamadaggan Rikhi being angry for some cause with his wife Ambikā, the mother of Paras Rām, ordered the latter to beat her, and he did so. In expiation Paras Rām gave lands to the brahmans of Nirmanda, who in turn, agreed to spend one-tenth of the produce on this *bhuṇḍā* fair.[12]

The most remarkable thing about *bhuṇḍā* is that its ceremony bears traces of human sacrifice perhaps earlier prevalent in this region and hence may have a great antiquity. Similar kinds of ritual existed not only in some parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, but also in Tibet and China.[13] Therefore, the Paraśurāma tradition cannot be held responsible for the beginning of this sacrifice, but it seems that they accommodated such rituals within the broad ambit of their cultic practices. It is quite possible that in the earlier days this human sacrifice was offered to Varuṇa, whose image is also kept in the Nirmanda cave temple/*kothi* of Paraśurāma. It is not exactly known when actual human sacrifices were stopped, but later, instead of such sacrifice, the victim [sacrificial human] was lowered on a rope from mountain top to the valley, leaving it to chance whether he was killed or not. *Bhuṇḍā* is believed to be an old *narmedi jag*, i.e. human sacrificial ritual, and its customs and rites are believed to be the same. According to tradition, a person of the Beda caste [a low caste of dancers] was selected for this ritual. He used to make a rope himself on which he was lowered, amidst rituals and fanfare. No one from any other caste could be lowered. This practice was stopped at Nirmanda when in 1868[14] a Beda was killed in this exercise and in 1893 a goat was lowered on the rope.[15]

The *bhuṇḍā* is an elaborate sacrificial ritual, preparation for which starts almost three years in advance. Four brahmanas pray and sacrifice daily by burning rice, fruit, ghee and goat flesh, the fire being placed in an earthen vessel sunk some four feet in the ground. This vessel is called *nabhe kuṇḍa* and it is only opened for the *bhuṇḍā*. An image of Kāli was set up opposite to it and small brass images of the goddess Mahiṣāsurmardinī were also placed nearby on the *Iśāna koṇa*. This image is made by a person of the Katha caste, who were said to have been brought here by Paraśurāma.

Before the function begins, many other *deotas* are summoned and the ceremony cannot take place until they come. The *deotas* are invited only from those villages that are traditionally believed to have been established by Paraśurāma. The images of *deotas* do

not attend the function, only the silver vessels representing them participate. Five days before the invitation-giving ceremony, called *chhamorchhani* in the local language, the image of Paraśurāma is brought out from the cave and placed on the first floor of the *kothi* for *darśana*. Then *parohaḍ* [16] is recited in front of Paraśurāma, which is a way of welcoming invited gods. There are many other rituals and functions associated with it. One such ceremony called *jadapujan* or *jalapujan* is of great importance, which is aimed at testing the *satītva* of married women of the brahmana families of this village. The third day of the *bhuṇḍā* is most important, when the image of Paraśurāma is brought out of the *kothi* and taken to the *akhārā* of *dasanāmi* sadhus and the Beda [sacrificial victim] is taken to the place of sacrifice in a big procession. With this the sacrifice comes to an end.[17] The association of Paraśurāma, rather, his prime importance in this *yajña*, is indicative of his strong cultic position in this part of the Himalayas.

Folk Rituals and Popular Beliefs

There are some instances of popular beliefs in the divinity of Paraśurāma in other parts of the Himalayas and in south India. For example, in Sirmaur district, Paraśurāma is worshipped as a guardian deity against cattle diseases. Jamu temple is especially famous for the same.[18] Incidently, the *Atharvaveda* invokes Jamadagni for a charm against worms in cattle.[19] It is possible that earlier Jamadagni was worshipped as a deity for cattle in the Himalayas and later this attribute was transferred to Paraśurāma in this region. In the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, whenever there is scarcity of rain, people go to the place known as Paraśurāma *Kṣetra* and pray to the god Paraśurāma to send rain. It is significant to note that the group of people involved in these faiths are from the lower Kunbi caste.[20]

On the higher ranges of Kerala, three of Paraśurāma's cairns were reported, where the mountain-tribe, the Malla Arriyans kept lamps burning. Stone circles are very rare; one, much dilapidated, was called "a rāshis hill of Paraśurāma". [21] The Bhavsars are mainly dyers and calico-printers and Dhobi or washermen. They are mainly

settled in cities and large towns of Gujarat, Maharashtra and many parts of south India. Apart from Ingala Devi, they also pay devotion to Khandoba, Bālāji, Hanuman and Paraśurāma, the incarnation of Viṣṇu and the slayers of kshatriyas. Paraśurāma is represented by a Panja [metalic palm] and is adored with the sacrifice of a sheep. In this worship, the brahmanas do not take any part and the head of the household officiates as the priest.[22]

Temple Rituals

Historical sources do not supply any detail about daily rituals and sacred performances observed in temples but anthropological accounts can fill some gaps in this regard. One such account recorded at Pedhe[23] informs that the daily routine of rituals begin at five in the morning with drumbeats. Then the god is given a bath and worshipped. At eight o'clock in the morning a boom from the gun announces the time for the morning *dhupāratī*. By eleven the main worship is performed after which the presentation of *mahānaivedya* takes place. Music is played from the drum-house while this ritual is on. The image is dressed and decked in garlands and bouquets of flowers. The presentation of the *naivedya* in the evening again occasions the beat of the drum. By eight, the palanquin procession is taken out, which circumbulates the temple and visits the surrounding deities en route. The gun fires a blast to proclaim this procession and the daily ritual comes to an end. All performances are common to other deities prevalent in Maharashtra except for the gunfire, which is unique to this temple.

Similarly, sacred performances recorded at the Paraśurāma kuṇḍa temple[24] in Arunachal Pradesh are quite common, with emphasis on various rounds of *āratī* which is a custom of waving an earthen lamp along with jingling a bell in honour of deities. In the temple of Paraśurāma, three principal *āratīs* are performed daily, namely *maṅgala āratī, sandhyā āratī,* and *śayana āratī. Maṅgala āratī,* i.e. auspicious waving of the earthen lamp is performed at 7 a.m. when the deities are supposed to get up from bed. The priest sings the auspicious song and waves the cotton wicks soaked in ghee. *Sandhyā āratī* is performed at 6 p.m. and *sandhyā vandana*

is recited. He performs *āratī* in the same manner as *maṅgala āratī*. The *śayana āratī* is performed at about 7.30 p.m in the evening, when the deities are believed to retire for the night and then the doors of the temple are closed. Lord Viṣṇu is also worshipped whenever there is an *āratī*, except at the time of the *śayana āratī*, in the temple. However, *āratī* is not performed in the shrine of Lord Viṣṇu. On the day of *Makara Saṃkrānti*, the temple remains open after midnight but the *maṅgal āratī* is performed in time.

The offerings usually include dryfruits or sesonal fruits. Besides temple priests, pilgrims also perform *ārati*. The practice of *Pānañchōpachāra* is common which is to offer worship through five articles, namely *gandha, puṣpa, dhūpa, dīpa, tāmbūla,* as found in any other Hindu temple. However, *śoḍaṣopachāra pūjana,* i.e. worship with sixteen articles is also organised during the *melā*. There are some minor differences between these two, such as the recitation of Vedic verses, which is a must in the case of *śoḍasopachār* but not necessary in the former.

Pilgrims observe four main types of sacred performances here, such as *snāna, pūjana, śrāddha* and *dāna*. Earlier pilgrims used to come to Paraśurāma kuṇḍa only for *snāna*, but gradually the tradition of worship and *śrāddha* was introduced. Now people from Rajasthan and Nepal come here to perform *pitṛśrāddha* near the kunda. Some of them perform *lakh batti* ritual, in which one lakh ghee *battis* are made and lit in front of the temple. Then the family members circumbulate the temple and take the *battis* to the bank of the river Lohit.

Kavitta

Devotion to Paraśurāma as God is evident in many of the *āratī* songs composed in many Indian languages. The following is an example of a *kavitta,* which was recorded by H.A. Rose in the Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh.

Parvat chir tāl banā nir gharā jahān bhar maṇḍ hai,
Bādshah gharib dhiāwen kalah jahan par chaṇḍ hai.
Ashnān kiye pāp jāt dhiān kiye tāp jāt

Darśana kiye sarāp jat, maya jahān aisi akhaṇḍ hai.
Chanan samān kāshaṭ jahan
Kanchan samān pākhān jahān,
Shir samān nir jahān aisā adhbat maṇḍ hai
Rainkā samān tirath, lok tari lok bhawan mein,
Gupat jagah bas kito charon taraf jahan ban khand hai.
Kitni hi tirath bāsi aisā rakhte hain agyān,
Jinko ashnan karanā phansi ke barābar ḍanḍ hai.
Man men dhiāyan aur kām mukh se bolen jai Paras Rām,
Din rāt pare Karen āram, jinko darshan karnā zihir hai.
Kahe Dewā Hirā Lāl man papi kā chhor khiyal'
Hot Paras Rām diāl, jin par unki mihr hai.

It says: "The hill was broken, and the lake made full of deep water, kings and the poor worship there, and the miracle is known far and wide. By bathing sins fly away, by devoutly meditating trouble flees, by looking at it curses depart, where such prosperity is. Wood is like sandal, stone like gold, and water like milk at this wondrous place. There is no place so sacred as Rainkā, the place that is holy and densely wooded all around. Some pilgrims are so foolish, that to bathe is to them as great a penalty as hanging. They are thinking of other things, while with their lips say *Jai Paras Rām*. They take their ease night and day, but to visit a temple is poison to them. Says Dewa Hira Lal, take no thought of your sin, Paras Rām favours those to whom he is gracious".[25]

2. Fairs and Festivals

Festivals are popular and worldly expressions of cults and rituals. The celebration of festivals in the honour of a deity is a reflection of his/her social base and mass appeal. Therefore, a short survey of these popular expressions may reveal some of the dimensions of Paraśurāma cult. If one begins from the Himalayas, Sirmaur district is the most important region from this point of view. Its famous Reṇukā Lake is visited by thousands of pilgrims every

year on Kārttika *Ekādasī*. The area around Reṇukā Lake turns into a camping site where villagers from far-flung areas come and stay for a couple of days. Night-long *kīrtanas* and festivities are held. Now it is a state fair and government make large-scale arrangements for it. It is considered the most important fair of the state.

At the time of the fair, the brass idol of Paraśurāma is brought in a silver pālki from village Jamu, which is considered to be his permanent abode. The deity remains in the temple for three days, i.e. from *sudi daśamī* to *dvādasī* [from 10th to the 12th of the bright half]. The eleventh day the bright half of Kārttika month is considered most auspicious by the pilgrims who take bath chanting *Bol Reṇukā Mai Ki Jai, Bol Paraśurāma Devatā Ki Jai* [Victory to mother Reṇukā, Victory to god Paraśurāma]. The hill people pray to the pujari by asking him questions during the night when he goes into a trance and turns an oracle. On the *dvādasī*, generally, the people offer alms after the holy dip in the Reṇukā lake. [26]

In some lower Mahāsu areas of Solan district, the *thothe-ka khel* is performed during the *Śarad Pūrṇimā*. A fair held in front of the temple of Dānu deotā in the month of Kārttika to celebrate the victory of Paraśurāma over Sahasrārjuna, the demon king. *Thoda* or *thotha* is a unique martial game of the Khasa people of Himachal Pradesh. On *Śarad Purnimā* day, Paraśurāma is said to have chopped off the thousand arms of Sahasrabāhu and slaughtered him. To commemorate this victory of Paraśurāma, *thodā* bouts are arranged outside temples dedicated to Sahasrārjuna or Dānu *deotā* in Kunihar area. Bows, arrows and *dāngrās* [axe] are displayed to exhibit the supremacy of Paraśurāma, who turned out victorious in the legendary battle on this day.[27]

Every region displays some distinctness in the celebration of fairs and festivals. The phenomenon of palanquin processions and martial art is not found in the Ganga–Yamuna valley. Yet some of the fairs and festivals are associated with the legend and cult of Paraśurāma in this region too. For example, at Runakta, near Mathura, apart from *Ganga Daśaharā* and *Somāvati Amāvasyā*, on the occasion of *Paraśurāma jayantī* a fair is organised.[28]

Similarly, the Rama Rai fair at Jind in Haryana is a famous religious fair which is celebrated on *Purṇamāsī* in Vaiśākha [April-May] and Kārttika [Oct.-Nov.]. Ram Rai or Ramahṛda, as it is known, is connected with Paraśurāma, who is said to have killed kshatriyas at this place. In the temple the idols of Paraśurāma with his parents Jamadagni and Reṇukā are placed, where people worship them after taking a bath in a holy tank called the Sanet *tīrtha*.[29] There is another place called Ramasar in the same district where a *melā* Ramasar is organised. This religious fair is celebrated every month at Danda Khurd [Narwana tehsil]. There is a holy tank named Ramasar tank which is associated with the myth of Paraśurāma, earthen lamps are lit at the tank and *Shakkar* [Jaggery] is distributed as ritual on this occasion.[30]

Just like Sannahita of Thanesara, Sannahita near Jind is also a famous *tīrtha*. On the occasion of solar and lunar eclipses, a big fair is organised at this place. In the month of Vaiśākha and Kārttika also fairs take place. Pilgrims take baths in this *tīrtha* and perform the worship of Paraśurāma and his father Jamadagni and mother Reṇukā.[31] Similarly, at Kundin village in Rajasthan, a fair is held in the month of May which lasts for three days and is attended by a large number of pilgrims who bathe in the pool and also perform *śrāddha* sacrifices for their ancestors. This pool, called Matri Kundin, is closely associated with the sin-destroying penance of Paraśurāma.[32]

Konkan has a rich tradition of celebrating festivals related to Paraśurāma. For instance, on the third day of the bright half of Vaiśākha, cold water and winnowing fans are distributed as a token for appeasing the manes of ancestors. This day is also celebrated as the birthday of God Paraśurāma.[33] But the festival celebrated at the Chiplun temple of Paraśurāma is the most remarkable and needs to be mentioned in detail.

The most important festival of the Paraśurāma temple at Chiplun is the birth anniversary or *jayantī* of Paraśurāma, also known as *Akṣayatṛtīyā*. Its celebration starts from the first day of the month of *Vaiśākha* and the festivities of this occasion may be compared with the celebaration of *Rāmanavamī* or

Kṛṣṇajanmāṣṭamī observed in many parts of north India. The account of this festival has been reported by M.S. Mate thus: "Hundreds of devotees gather there from all over the Konkan. The first day or *pratipadā* begins as usual, but instead of the usual *āratī, abhiṣeka* is performed on the image. Thereafter, a music concert is held in the *sabhā maṇḍapa*. Singers and instrumentalists of the nearby areas come and perform before the deity. This is considered a *sevā*/service or the worship of the god. The number of artistes who come here is surprisingly large. During the musical performances, the managers of the festivals distribute alms and foodgrains to sadhus and sanyasis. The afternoon worship session is the same as usual. After the presentation of *mahānaivedya*, meals are served to the priests. In the *sabhā maṇḍapa*, a special throne-like seat known as the *makhara* is erected. This *makhara* is a miniature pavilion, the chief components of which are the cusped arches and cypress pillars. In the evening the image is brought out of the *garbhagṛha* and placed in this *makhara*, to preside over the concert that is to follow. For this, only persons well versed in the art of performing *kīrtana* attend in large numbers. Then at eight the palanquin procession is taken out with great pomp. To round off the day's proceedings another *kīrtana* takes place".

"On the second day programmes are almost similar to that of the first day, the only difference is that many more persons attend the feast. In the evening the *janmotsava* or birthday celebration takes place, during which the chief *kīrtana* is performed. The same programme is repeated on the third day exception is that of *janmotsava*. On the third day the evening procession is much bigger and more colourful. A huge crowd is present and the palanquin moves around the shrine five times instead of once. A band of musicians accompanies the procession. By around midnight this procession popularly known as *chhabina* in Marathi comes to an end. Then again a series of kirtans take place. When this is over, the *lalit* begins. The *lalit* is a sort of a rustic drama depicting the various incarnations of gods or representing some mythological tales. This is a very popular feature of this festival and a large

number of people are present to witness it in spite of the fact that it begins at an odd hour i.e. very early in the morning".[34]

Another important festival of this temple takes place on Mārgaśīrṣa *Ekādasī*, i.e. in December when Pandharpur Viṭhobā is thought to be spiritually present at *Paraśurāmakṣetra*. Hence for the last hundred years the people from the surrounding areas perform a seven-day festival and pilgrimage. This is an example of the accommodation and interaction between different cults of the same region. *Mahāśivarātri* celebration is also performed in this temple, and a *yātrā* is undertaken by the devotees. Many people make a vow to Paraśurāma and they visit the temple throughout the year.[35]

It is well known that in south India the Paraśurāma cult is deeply integrated with the cult of Reṇukā and Yeḷḷammā. At Chiknayakahalli, the shrine of the *grāma devatā* is consecrated by Hirimāvarada Yeḷḷammā, who is also known as Reṇukādevi, with a stone head set up in front along with a one-foot-high image of Jamadagni. Here the processional image is a wooden figure of Paraśurāma, which is taken out during the annual festival.[36]

Ramanathapura village in Arkalgud taluk of Hassan district is a noted centre of pilgrimage. Its most important temple is the Prasanna Rameshvara temple, which is constructed in the old Hoyśāḷa style. The most significant thing to note in this regard is that the annual car festival of this deity takes place on the Vaiśākha *Śukla Tṛtīyā*, which clearly links it to the Paraśurāma tradition.[37] Another cult centre associated with Paraśurāma at Atterala in Andhra Pradesh also celebrates the annual festival. The Paraśurāma temple is lit up on this special occasion. The *utsava* at Atterala, held during the month of Māgha [January-February] is attended by thousands of devotees.[38] The Thiruvallam Paraśurāma temple organises a fair named *Arāt* for ten days beginning from *Athan* in *Thulam*.[39]

3. The Development of Paraśurāma's Iconography

The development of iconography has generally been deeply integrated with the cultic system of a deity. A cult with a wider

social base creates diverse and more complex iconography. Most of the scholars hold the view that there is nothing complicated in the iconography of Paraśurāma, as it is simple and somewhat uniform.[40] However, the survey of some of the sculptures and visual depictions of Paraśurāma shows that there are many variations and not all of them stick to the classical dictum of an iconographic index. T.A. Gopinatha Rao,[41] while describing the iconography of Paraśurāma, has noted that in sculpture, the rule is that the figure of Paraśurāma should be worked out according to the *madhyama-daśa tāla* measure,[42] that is, it should be of 120 *aṅgulas* in height, and should possess only two hands; the *Paraśu* should be held in the right hand, and the left hand should be in the *Sūci* pose [as if pointing to some thing]. On the head there should be a *jaṭā-mukuṭa* and the *yajñōpavīta* should adorn the body, as also a number of ornaments. The colour of Paraśurāma's body should be red; and his clothing should be white. However, another passage in the *Atri Saṃhitā* of the *Vaikhānasāgama* says that the figure should be red in colour, dressed in blue and richly ornamented.[43] The *kautuka–bēra* of Paraśurāma may be either two handed or be an ordinary figure of Viṣṇu with four hands.

According to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa,* [44] he should have a *jaṭā* on his head and should be shown as wearing deer skin. His only emblem should be the axe. The *Agni Purāṇa*[45] prescribes four hands for the image of Paraśurāma carrying *paraśu, khaḍga, bāṇa* and *dhanuṣa. Vaikhānasāgama*[46] describes two varieties of the image of Paraśurāma. One is two-handed and the other is four-handed. The two-handed image should have an axe in the right hand and the left should be in *śuci-mudrā.* He should wear *jaṭāmukuta, yajñopavīta* and other ornaments. If the image is four-handed, it should hold the usual attributes of Viṣṇu.

The *Skanda Purāṇa* [47] says that his body should be white in colour [*gaura*] with red eyes [*tāmrākṣau*] and matted hair [*jaṭilā*] wearing white cloths [*śitavāsasaḥ*] and sacred thread [*yajñopavītin*]. He has a *paraśu* in his hand [*paraśupāṇiḥ*]. He is also mentioned to be free from anger [*tyakta krodha*]. It is evident that the *paraśu* as a symbol of Paraśurāma has been emphasised

in this text also. But he is supposed to be depicted as being free from anger according to this text, which is unusual. Dharaṇi is stated to be the name of his consort.

On the placement of deities in a temple, the *Agni Purāṇa*[48] makes an observation that the image of Varāha should be in the east, Nṛsiṃha in the south, Śrīdhara, a form of Viṣṇu, in the west, Hayagriva in the north, Jāmadagnyaka, i.e. Paraśurāma, in the south-east, Rāma in the south-west, Vāmana in the north-west and Vāsudeva in the north-east. The temple should be decorated with gems all around, leaving out one-eighth of the door; if that is done, it will not be defective.

It is difficult to push the antiquity of the Paraśurāma sculptures prior to the early medieval period. However, an image belonging to the Gupta period and discovered from the Timba village near Amreli in Gujarat, is believed to be crucial in this regard. It is a mutilated piece, hence its exact identification is arduous, but an axe in the right hand of the figure indicates that it may be the representation of Paraśurāma. If the identification is correct, this image may represent the earliest sculpture of Paraśurāma and testify to the prevalence of Paraśurāma worship in Gujarat.[49]

From early medieval period onwards, the sculptures and iconography of Paraśurāma become quite visible. These depictions also show some variations. For example, on the left outside wall of the Pārśvanātha temple at Khajuraho, there are two images, possibly of Paraśurāma, both of them holding a fruit, perhaps a citron, the conch, the lotus and the battle-axe. The attributes of these images are quite different from the attributes suggested by the Sanskrit texts cited above.[50] Similarly, a late medieval image of a four-handed Paraśurāma was found in Chamba, which holds the mace and the conch in the lower hands and the upper ones hold the battle-axe and the bow.[51]

An image of Paraśurāma from the Rāṇihāṭi *Deul* preserved in a private collection at Tangibad, Dacca was reported by N.K. Bhattasali. The god stands in the *tribhaṅga* pose and has, clockwise, the *padma*, *paraśu*, *śaṅkha* and *chakra* in his four hands. Garuḍa

is depicted as kneeling at the bottom with folded hands.[52] The Keśava temple of Somanathapur in Karnataka has several large wall images of various deities, including that of Paraśurāma. Around the *garbhagṛha* there is a long row of wall images, each about 2 feet high, the whole sculpture being 3 feet high, including the base and *toraṇa*. These images represent Viṣṇu and other important deities in their varied forms. In the same series, the image of Viṣṇu as Paraśurāma is also depicted, with four arms holding *padma, paraśu, chakra* and *musala*. The *musala* is carried by other forms of Viṣṇu, also such as Trivikrama and Halāyudha.[53] The same temple of Somnathpur has some small wall images too in which Paraśurāma is depicted with *paraśu, padma, chakra* and *śaṅkha*.[54] Another large wall image [image no. 156, 157] shows Paraśurāma with *śaṅkha, gadā, pāśa, paraśu, padma* and *chakra*.[55] Therefore, this temple supplies various kinds of iconography of Paraśurāma and none of them strictly follows the standard code of prescribed iconography.

Pungeshwar Mahādeva temple at Kandela, Pithauragarh has all the avatāras along with Paraśurāma on the *parikar (halo)*. In a standing sculpture, Bhārgava Rāma is portrayed with long locks, axe [*paraśu*] in right hand, in *tribhaṅga* style and with the left hand on the waist [*kaṭihasta mudrā*].[56] From Aihole, another image of Paraśurāma showing Viṣṇu symbols in addition to his own has been reported. In a minor shrine no. 68 of the group of Ramaliṅga temples at Aihole, this stone image was found dismantled from its original place. This Aihole image is made of a dark-bluish schist of soft grain and 35 inches high, 21 inches wide and 3 inches thick. It is a four-armed sculpture showing in the upper right hand a *paraśu*, in the lower right hand a *pāśa*, in the upper left hand a *dhanu* and in the lower left hand which is now missing perhaps a *kamaṇḍalu* or may be an arrow. But the presence on the back rest of the image of a *śaṅkha* directly above the upper right hand and a *chakra* above the upper left arm and a *gadā* adjacent to the lower left hand invests this image with a feature which makes it unique, if not a rare example of this type.[57]

The image of a seated Paraśurāma has been reported from the Rameśvara temple at Narsamangala, a little village about 17 km to the south-west of Chāmarājanagar and about 13 km to the south-east of Terakaṇāmbi in Karnataka. The sculpture of the temple has similarities with Ellora, therefore a date of 800 CE has been assigned to it. This area was under the rule of the Gangas and it seems to be a Ganga temple dedicated to Śiva. In this temple, against the north wall in the *navaraṅga*, is now seated on a high damaged pedestal a large two-handed image of what appears to be Paraśurāma, seated with one knee resting on the seat and the other folded upward. His right hand holding a small mace-axe rests on the right knee. His left hand rests on the left thigh. His hair is loose and ends in ringlets. He wears the *makara–kuṇḍala* in his long earlobes and a jewelled diadem and necklace one of which has beaded pendants and hangings. He wears also the *yajñopavīta* and a jewelled lion–band on the lower breast. His waist–cloth is not prominent. As in the sculptures in Ellora and Elephanta, the god's lower lip is thick while the upper is thin. He has a light smile.[58]

The Vīranārāyaṇa temple at Belvadi village, on Banavar-Chikmagalur road, about 7 km directly to the north of Halebid, which is a Hoyśāḷa structure, has a figure of Govinda with an attendant deity holding a *paraśu* and a fruit, which is a symbol of Paraśurāma. There is a depiction of the *daśāvatāra* on the *prabhāvalī* of the main deity as well.[59] Apart from that wall images of various Viṣṇu avatāras about 2½ ft. high are placed on the eastern wall. Paraśurāma is depicted with a lady attendant in this sculpture.[60]

Vidyāśaṅkara Temple at Śṛṅgeri [1357–58 CE] also has a large wall image at the second south doorway and the south-west corner has seven Prajapatis. In the west, the avatāras are depicted including Paraśurāma who is illustrated with a battle axe in the right hand and bow and arrow in the left, with *garuḍa* and a snake on the pedestal.[61]

The North Arcot district of Tamil Nadu has a temple of Reṇukāmbal in Padaividu which contains in the niches, the figure of Paraśurāma and Jamadagni, apart from that of Reṇukā. There

are some bronzes of Paraśurāma in the temple, which show him with two hands holding a bow and arrow. The image of Paraśurāma from Tirukkaṇṇamaṅgai, Thanjavur district, is found in the niche on the outer wall of the shrine. This figure also has only two hands, the left carrying a bow and the right an axe. The date of the image is uncertain but stylistic features suggest that it may be placed between Cōḷa and Vijayanagar periods. An image of Paraśurāma with four hands, the two upper hands holding *śaṅkha* and *chakra*, the characteristic attribute of Viṣṇu and the lower right hand holding the axe and lower left in *varada*, is found in the Kodaṇḍarāmasvāmī temple in Ariyalur in the Tiruchchirappalli district. The figure seems to be a late representation of the 15th–16th century, as the highly ornate style and presence of the long *vanamālā* indicate. The image of Paraśurāma in Saundatti is a singular sculpture, representing him as holding a *chaudiki* [musical instrument] with both hands, the *paraśu* and *triśūla* are represented on both sides of the image.[62]

Thus Tamil Nadu presents more varied types of Paraśurāma iconography than encoded in texts. It is clear that Paraśurāma with four hands was more favoured than a two-handed one, which not only brings him closer to Viṣṇu's iconography but also attributes divinity to him without any contest and differentiates between the perception of him being a god from that of a sage. However, these two types cannot be slotted in any particular time frame and two-handed images are also reported from the late medieval period.

The Nāt-Hlaung temple at Pagan, Burma [now Myanmar] also has an image of Paraśurāma as part of the *daśāvatāras*. This temple is claimed to be a 10th-century [931–64 CE.] structure but the latter half of the 11th century may be a more appropriate date for this Viṣṇu temple. The fourth niche of the temple is occupied by an image easily distinguishable as Paraśurāma. The figure stands on a lotus throne flanked by two full-blown lotuses; it is crowned by the usual head dress and has the usual ornamental decorations. The attitude of the body is erect but the head is slightly bent towards the right. The hands, two in number, hold respectively a staff like object, perhaps a *khaḍga* or sword raised upward, and an axe,

resting on the left shoulder. The latter attribute determines the iconography of the sculpture. Here the icon differs somewhat from written texts.[63] The image reveals that inspiration was taken from the Eastern Indian school of art, although the temple was constructed under the influence of south Indian brahmans. Perhaps the artists were trained in the Pāla school of art.[64]

4. Paraśurāma's Portrayal as Avatāra

One important feature of Paraśurāma's cultic presence has been his place among the avatāras of Viṣṇu. Although his status of an independent cult figure and the guardian deity of shrines does not have any existence in many parts of India, he is more visible as a part of the *daśāvatāra* in temples of north as well as south India. The cultic significance and ritual value of a depiction may be determined on the basis of location of its portrayal. If an image is located on the halo of the main deity, it also becomes a part of the ritual offerings and shows more closeness to the centre of ritual. On the other hand, if it exists outside the strict ritual area, and more specifically the *garbhagṛha*, then its ritual significance will diminish according to its distance from the centre of the shrine. Therefore, only those depictions of the Paraśurāma avatāra are discussed here which may have carried some kind of ritual significance. Many other portrayals of Paraśurāma in art and sculpture, although documented, have not been discussed here.

There are portrayals of Paraśurāma along with other avatāras on the *parikar* (halo) of many Viṣṇu images found in the temples of Uttaranchal. For instance, at Kuvanali in Ranikhet which has a Badrinatha temple in which the *daśāvtāras* are depicted on the *parikar* along with Paraśurāma. The Paveneśvara Mahādeva temple complex at Pubhaun, Almora has two temples which have yielded avatāra representations. The first is in the Lakṣmī–Nārāyaṇa temple where Viṣṇu's image includes the depiction of avatāra along with Paraśurāma on the *parikar*. The second is in the Brahmā temple which has three *parikars*. On the second *parikar* there exists the depiction of Paraśurāma along with Vāmana, Kalki, Kūrma,

Nṛsiṃha and Vyāsa. Pungeshwar Mahādeva temple of Kandela in Pithauragarh district also has a portrayal of all avatāras along with Paraśurāma on the *parikar*. Bhārgava Rāma is seen with long locks of hair, axe [*paraśu*] in right hand, in *tribhaṅga* style and with the left hand on the waist [*kaṭihasta mudrā*] is standing in the sculpture. Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple at Bharsoli, Pithauragarh and Pujeli, Badkot also have similar depictions of Paraśurāma as an avatāra on the *parikar*.[65]

At Maletha, which is 50 km fromTihri and 23 km from Devaprayāga, a broken image of Viṣṇu has been found. Paraśurāma, along with other avatāras, is depicted on the *parikar* of this image. Similarly, at Devalgadh in Paudi Garhwal a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple also has a depiction of Paraśurāma along with other avatāras on the *parikar*.

In Chamoli district, 30 km from Karnaprayaga tehsil on the right bank of the Pinder river there is a village called Narayana Bagar. Here, too, in the Nārāyaṇa temple all avatāras including Paraśurāma are present on the *parikar* of the Viṣṇu image. Kulsari village in Tharali tehsil of Chamoli district has another Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple, which is a 14th–15th-century structure where Paraśurāma is depicted on the left hand of the *parikar* of the image, including other avatāras.[66] Paraśurāma as part of the *Daśāvatāra* is found in many other shrines of the Chamoli district.[67]

Such a position of Paraśurāma can be found in several temples of south India. For example, in the Lakṣmī–Narasiṃha temple at Hora Kere, which is around 5 km from Shimoga. The depiction of the *daśāvatāras* including Paraśurāma can be seen in the *prabhāvalī* of the image.[68] In the Chennakeśava temple [CE1100] at Dharmapura village, about 15 km to the east-southeast of Huṇsur, the main image of Channakeśava, [about 7ft. high] inside the *garbhagṛha* stands in *samabhaṅga* on a Garuḍa pedestal, having a stone *prabhāvalī* which rises in the form of an arch including the *prabhāvalī* and the pedestal. The ten incarnations of Viṣṇu are carved on the *prabhāvalī* in six circular panels in this order, running from left to right: Matsya, Kūrma and natural Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma and Rāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa and Kalki. The

main image is beautifully carved with minute details of ornamentation and graceful contours of limbs.[69]

The Lakṣmīnarasiṃha temple at Ramanathapura in Hassan district, similarly, has on the *prabhāvalī* carvings of the ten avatāras of Viṣṇu in eight panels from right to left as follows: anthropoid Matsya, anthropoid Kūrma, anthropoid Varāha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha [standing like Jina] and Kalki.[70] The Mudugere temple of Yoganarasiṃha at Ammanhallikoppalo in Hassan taluk, is a Hoysāḷa structure. The god is seated on a pedestal about 2 feet high, his *prabhā* or halo being sculptured with the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu. It is perhaps a 12th–13th century representation.[71]

A significant class of the cult objects in this context happens to be a type of stone slab which bears the image of Viṣṇu and his avatāras. These votive relics have been called *Viṣṇupaṭṭa* by N.K. Bhattasali on the analogy of the well-known *Ayāgapaṭṭas* of the Jainas. Bhattasali has reported several such *Viṣṇupaṭṭas* from east Bengal, on which avatāras are depicted. These stone slabs are specimens of inferior sculpture, being the work of novices. In all probability these were kept in Viṣṇu temples in large numbers to be sold to poor devotees or pilgrims. They would carry one home as a memento of their visit to the temple and hang it on the wall of their dwellings, as a sacred object to receive occasional homely worship. Therefore, the cultic significance of these slabs cannot be underrated. Perhaps they were precursors of modern calendars and served a religious purpose as well.

Many such slabs have come from the Raghurampur excavations. In one of the slabs, on the obverse, Viṣṇu is depicted, with Pṛithavī as his wife. The reverse depicts only two incarnations–the dancing figure of Rāma with an arrow; and half of a second figure with an axe, looking like a club may be that of Paraśurāma. Similarly, another fragment has Kīrtimukha on the obverse and fragments of Paraśurāma and Balarāma that can be recognised on the reverse. In a black stone square slab, there is a ten-petal lotus engraved, which has incarnations represented on it. Paraśurāma comes in the seventh place but the weapon in hand

is a club, not an axe. Interestingly, Balarāma is sometimes omitted in these slabs and Trivikrama is included. Paraśurāma, who is supposed to occupy the sixth position, is replaced by Trivikrama. In some cases Paraśurāma is altogether omitted in favour of Trivikrama. One of the mud-coloured stone slabs from the same excavation does not contain Paraśurāma in its description. It is also noteworthy that in many of these slabs Paraśurāma is placed after Rāma.[72]

A somewhat similar type of *daśāvatāra* stone plate [*śilāpaṭṭa]* has also been reported from a Badrinatha temple of Gadhaser village in the Katyur Ghati. This village is situated on the left bank of the river Garudaganga and lies 72 km from Almora and 22 km from Bagesar. This *śilāpaṭṭa* [75 × 25 cm] depicts various avatāras of Viṣṇu and incidents related to them. For example, Paraśurāma–Sahasrabāhu war, Rāma–Rāvaṇa war, etc. are depicted on it. From its style it appears as a sculpture belonging to the 15th century.[73] Both Bageshwar and Baijnatha have yielded such *daśāvatāra Paṭṭas* independently.[74] Tegowa, near Jabbalpur, has a very interesting carving on a slab, having in its centre a standing figure of Viṣṇu with two arms, attended by two females and around this principal group are small representations of the nine avatāras of Viṣṇu, including that of Paraśurāma.[75] A slab with the carvings of avatāras has also been reported at a tank of Bahuriband in western India.[76]

Some of the representations of Paraśurāma as part of the *daśāvatāras* are reported from the *toraṇa* of the image or inside the sanctum. The Janārdana temple near the Rāmeśvara temple at Narasamangala has yielded this kind of depiction of Paraśurāma as part of the *daśāvatāras*. Parts of the Janārdana temple were found among the ruins, and beneath the floral *toraṇa* on either side were seen the avatāras of Viṣṇu. On the right side, the Matsya and Kūrma were missing; but the Varāha, Nṛsiṃha and Vāmana avatāras are visible. On the left side of the *toraṇa* [the broken piece was, however, found among the ruins] were Paraśurāma, Śrī Rāma, Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha and Kalki, all sculpted in the convolutions of the *toraṇa*.[77] In the Somanathapur temple, again

near the south *garbhagṛha* on the fringe of the *toraṇa,* are shown the ten avatāras, viz. Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Śrī Rāma, Balarāma, Buddha and Kalki.[78]

Central India provides several instances of Paraśurāma's being consecrated as part of the *daśāvatāra* inside niches. One of the western circle reports of the ASI informs that in the old Indore state there exists the largest and the most pretentious temple of Varāha at one end of the village Kohala in the district of Garoth. There are three niches on the top of the back slab, two near the *makara* at the ends and the third at the top. The niche on the left is occupied by a seated figure of Brahmā with four hands and that of the right side by a four-handed Śiva. The niche on the top is occupied by the Vāmana incarnation of Viṣṇu. On each side of the niche on the top there is a small niche, the one on the left containing an image of Balarāma while the one on the right contains a figure of Kalkin. The corresponding space on the right is occupied by a figure of Paraśurāma. Apart from that, another part of the temple has figures of Balarāma, Narasiṃha and Rāma placed on the right and those of Kalki and Paraśurāma on the left.[79]

The Sun temple at Sesai in district Sivpuri has the *rūpa-śākha* supported by a *bhāra–putraka* on each side, which consists of pilastered niches containing the *daśāvtāra* of Viṣṇu. On the left side from top downwards there are Matsya, Kūrma, Nṛsiṃha, Paraśurāma, Balarāma and Kalki *avtāras* and on the right side are Varāha, Vāmana, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.[80] In another Sun temple at Markhera [CE. 850–950], at least seven incarnations of Viṣṇu can be identified in the niches of the *prati-rathas* of the *jaṅghā* portion, and these include Vāmana, Balarāma, Paraśurāma, Kṛṣṇa, Buddha, Nṛsiṃha and Varāha.[81] The presence of Viṣṇu's avatāras in the Sun temple may have something to do with his association with the solar world.

The Gopālakṛṣṇa temple at Agumbe, which belongs to the Vijayanagar period, has two pilasters of the intended square kind supporting the *toraṇa* arch whose creeper scroll has in the convolutions the ten avatāras. These avatāras are anthropoid Matsya and Kūrma, animal Varāha and seated figures of Nṛsiṃha,

Vāmana, Paraśurāma, Rāma, Halāyudha, baby Kṛṣṇa on all fours, and seated Kalki with head on a horse. The whole is a single piece stone about 5½ feet high and is placed upon a granite pedestal.[82]

Several temples have presented various kinds of sculptural images of avatāras. For example, the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh has a Viṣṇu temple at Saho, which has several images, some of which are probably those of his ten incarnations. These images resemble the inscribed brass image of Viṣṇu preserved at Lahore museum. Apart from that, the main image of Viṣṇu has a fish and tortoise on the right and above the halo are the images of Rāma and Buddha, together with Paraśurāma and Kalki.[83] In Deval Village of Karnaprayaga, there is a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple with a 59 × 56 cm image of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa inside its precincts. It also has representations of Rāma, Paraśurāma, Vāmana, Kalki and Nṛsiṃha avatāras.[84] In the Lucknow museum a Viṣṇu image [H.106] is decorated with the small figure of Kalki, Buddha, Balarāma, Rāma and Paraśurāma on the left side of the main figure and those of Matsya and Kūrma on the right whereas the other images seem to be broken.[85]

Between Sutrapada and Somanatha–Pattan, and nearly 3 km from the former, there is a village called Kadvar. In this village there were ruins of a very old and large temple, which is now dedicated to the Varāha avatāra. But from the unusual shape of this temple, a long rectangle instead of square, it has been concluded that the temple originally contained all the ten principal avatāras arranged upon the seat along the back wall opposite the door. Fragments of some of the images were found both within and outside the building. Among them images of Vāmana, and Paraśurāma with his bow and sheaf of arrows are very important.[86] The Vijapur taluk of Gujarat also has a shrine dedicated to the Varāha avatāra, where Paraśurāma is represented along with other avatāras.[87]

Daśāvatāra sculptures are reported from various places in central and western India. The Nimar district has several small temples, but the most interesting is named Chaubis Avatāra temple. It is so called because it used to contain sculptures representing

twenty-four incarnations of Viṣṇu. However, of these, only fifteen could be found.[88] At Sevadi, *daśāvatāra* and other sculptures have been found under a tree near the village.[89] In western India, the Dhamnar caves have monolithic temples with *daśāvatāra* sculptures in the shrine.[90] The Mārkaṇḍa Temple of *daśāvatāra* also follows the same pattern.[91] The ruined temple in Nurpur Fort Kangra has on the northern wall depictions of the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu. Perhaps it was built in the early Mughal period.[92]

South India also has several such temples. For instance, a 17th-century Añjaneya temple at Terakanāmbi, 12 km from Gundlupet contains a *garbhagṛha*, an open *śukanāsi* and a *maṇṭapa* of three *aṅkaṇa* open in the front. Among the carved images, there are several sculptures, including that of Paraśurāma. Other avatāras, Gaṇapati, Veṇugopāla and Garuḍa, etc. are also depicted.[93] Paraśurāma is the part of *daśāvatāras* in the Lakṣmīnarasiṃha temple at Ramanathapura in Hassan district as well as in the Chennakeśava temple at Hansur, which is dated around 1162 CE.[94]

There are some *daśāvatāra* illustrations which do not include Paraśurāma in its depiction. For example, the Batesar temple of Viṣṇu near Gwalior has no portrayal of Paraśurāma. The panel depicts Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Vāmana, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Buddha and Kalki along with two devotees with folded hands. Similarly, the Chaturbhuja temple in the Gwalior fort also does not contain Paraśurāma's image in its *daśāvatāra* depiction.[95] The Lakṣmīnarasiṃha temple at Javagal, 15 km from the Banavar railway station on Halebid road is a 13th-century structure. Here, wall images nearly 2 feet high are placed in the southeast of the *navaraṅga*. Image no. 4 of this temple is that of Paraśurāma along with other forms of Viṣṇu, but he is not depicted as an avatāra.[96] The Chennakeśava temple at Sadali also does not include Paraśurāma among other avatāras. However, Kalki is also absent from the later temple or at least nothing is said about the two of them in the ASMA report.[97]

Apart from these, there are many *daśāvatāra* temples in various parts of India, which have images of Paraśurāma in one or another

part of the temple. For instance, in the modern state of Uttaranchal, a *tīrtha* called Bhimagora is situated on the road, which starts from Har-ki-Pauri and goes to Rishikesh through the foothills of the mountain. On the way to Bhimgora on the banks of the river Ganga there is a Chaubis Avatāra temple, which depicts all the avatāras including Paraśurāma.[98] At a distance of one mile from Onkareshwara, upstream of the Narmadā, where the river Kaveri separates from the Narmada, there is another Chaubis avatāra temple along with that of Paśupatinātha, with a representation of Paraśurāma.[99] Similarly, at Rajim, which is around 50 km from Rampur in Chhattisgarh, the Rajivalochan temple depicts the *daśāvatāra*, including Paraśurāma.[100] Amvam in Kanwas tehshil of Kota Rajasthan, which is 30 km north-east of Mukandarra or Darra, has a *daśāvatāra* temple which also reports image of Paraśurāma.[101] About 26 km north-east of Mukundara there is a place called Amvam in Kota, Rajasthan where a Viṣṇu temple portrays the *daśāvatāras*, including that of Paraśurāma.[102] Therefore the avatārahood of Paraśurāma created an additional space for his cultic existence.

5. The Cult of Reṇukā and Jamadagni

Apart from consecration as an avatāra, another factor helping the cause of the Paraśurāma cult, has been its linkage with the religious order of Reṇukā and Jamadagni. There are many regions south of the Vindhyas which had witnessed predominance of the Reṇukā–Yellammā cult and Paraśurāma serves only a secondary role in that cycle. Yet the intimate relationship with these mother goddesses helped in the perpetuation of his cultic status.

Although some Purāṇas and *Māhātmyas* identify Reṇukā with Devī and Jamadagni with Śiva and texts like the *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Sahyādrikhaṇḍa, Kerala Māhātmya, Reṇukā Māhātmya, Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* contain one or other narrative related to this connection, yet it is important to note that Reṇukā has been more popular at the lower levels of society rather than at the upper brahmanic echelons. In fact, the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* has strong strictures against the worship of Reṇukā as deity. In this text, Kṛṣṇa is made

to say, "Those who do not worship the idol of Viṣṇu, but worship the idol of inferior goddesses like Reṇukā etc. of the form of daityas, purposeless is their worship of Viṣṇu as well as of the manes. This is true, very true, I say. If all what I have said is proved to be false and untrue, then let the lord of serpents sting me mortally."[103]

It is quite possible that such a stand of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*[104] is mainly due to this text being composed in such a geographical region that did not have any tradition of Reṇukā worship. In the south and in western India, one find various *Sthala Purāṇas* related to the *Reṇukā tīrtha* in vogue. Yet it is remarkable that neither the epics nor the earlier Purāṇas describe Reṇukā as a goddess. Therefore, the transformation of Reṇukā from a mere mythical figure in the *Mahābhārata* to a popular mother goddess may be better understood by studying the elements of popular culture responsible for this process.

It seems that the rise of Reṇukā as a deity largely occured in the region dominated by a pastoral population, who themselves had several deities with similar mythical structures. The principal cult centre of the goddess Reṇukā who is equated with Yellammai or Ellammā/Yeḷḷammā is in Saundatti [Saṃvadatti] in Belgaum district of Karnataka. It is important to note that Saundatti also lies in the north–south cattle herding tract. This place lies in a zone, which is still traversed every year during the monsoon season by herdsmen who spend the rest of the year near Kolhapur.[105] Sontheimer has elaborately described the relationship of Yeḷḷammā with the pastoral communities of western India. In this region Gāvlis, who are an important pastoral community, believe that Paraśurāma was born without a father from a tumour on the palm of Yelubai's [Yeḷḷammā] hand.[106] Even in Uttar Pradesh, the only Reṇukā temple is reported from Mathura, which is famous for other cults related to pastoral communities. In Himachal Pradesh the Reṇukā shrine lies in the lower Himalayan region, which might have been more suitable for pastoral communities, rather than middle or upper Himalayas.

How Reṇukā became a goddess

The rise of Reṇukā as a mother goddess was perhaps the result of a complex process, including the mergers of numerous personalities and myths. The Reṇukā myth in the *Mahābhārata* does not give any indication of her being a goddess herself nor does it present any narrative associated with the exchange of her head with that of pariah women, which became the key myth of her cult in the south Indian traditions. In the *Mahābhārata,* Reṇukā's head is neither changed nor does it lie separate for a long time; rather, it is rejoined immediately. But in south India this head exchange myth became the foundation stone of the Reṇukā cult through which the integration of many local mother goddess cults of that region could become possible. However, this could not have been possible without a certain space being available in the structure of the Reṇukā cult belonging to the northern tradition.

A Reṇukā *tīrtha* in the vicinity of Kurukṣetra is mentioned in the Tīrthayātrāparva of the *Mahābhārata.*[107] But there is nothing to suggest that it was dedicated to Jamadagni's wife Reṇukā. S.A. Dange's suggestion about the linkage between Reṇukā of the *Mahābhārata* and a non-anthropomorphic goddess of anthills of the same name seems quite insightful. He has pointed out that the *Skanda Purāṇa*[108] mentions a shrine of Reṇukā on the bank of river Suvarnamukhi where she existed in the form of an anthill and not in human form. She was seen and worshipped by a king on *Chaitra Navamī.* Here she is presented as a proper mother goddess who was offered animal sacrifice and jars of wine.[109] Anthills have been known to represent the ear of Prajāpati and the breast of the earth in Vedic literature too. Although the anthills had not attained the status of the earth goddess in Vedic literature, its ritual use, especially of the particles from its interior, were widely prevalent.[110] Anthill and termite mounds are reported to be worshipped among many pastoral communities of India.[111] Therefore, it is suggested that the first step towards the divinisation of Reṇukā, the mother of Paraśurāma took place by identifying her with Reṇukā, the anthill goddess. Through this mechanism a

non-anthropomorphic goddess was given human identity and this combination created a new cultic entity.

There is another possibility which seems more convincing than the earlier one. It has been argued in Chapter Two that we do not find any historical evidence for the immediate father–son relationship between Jamadagni and Paraśurāma. If that is accepted, then how is it possible to treat Reṇukā as the real mother of Paraśurāma, who was later transformed into a mother goddess? Therefore, it seems logical that while developing his lineage, a goddess popular among the pastoral tribes of Yamuna and Narmadā Valley was made the wife of Jamadagni and the mother of Paraśurāma. This area was also the stronghold of the Bhṛgu clan. Therefore, the initial association of Reṇukā with Bhṛgu clan may also be seen as the incorporation of a mother goddess in their own cultic paraphernalia. Later, such myths were constructed which presented Reṇukā as a brahmanic personality by declaring her to be the daughter of a king and a chaste wife of a *ṛṣi*. So Reṇukā did not become a goddess due to her association with the Bhṛgus or myth of matricide; rather, her devine antecedents led to her integeration with the Bhṛgu clan and myth of beheading. The construction of the Reṇukā myth might have followed her integration into the myth of the Bhṛgu clan rather than the other way round. One should, therefore, recognise a distinct probablity that Reṇukā was not a brahmanic personality but a tribal goddess belonging to the region north of the Vindhyas.

If Reṇukā was indeed a goddess before being incorporated into the myth as wife of Jamadagni, the question is: why is there no indication of her status in the *Mahābhārata*? This might be an example of humanisation of a goddess. The elevation of human beings to the level of divinity was not a unilinear process; it is rather the reverse of it. Thus often humanisation of divinities also took place. This may be especially true for many mother goddesses, like Urvaśī of the *Ṛg Veda* who was later transformed into an *apsarā* and later still into a human being by Kālidāsa.[112] It seems that in the same tradition, the *Mahābhārata* presents Reṇukā as a human being despite her having a divine past.

The growth of the Reṇukā cult in south India had many other dimensions too. As one moves to the south of the Vindhyas, the amalgamation of several mother goddesses such as Bhūdevī, who was worshipped as a female torso in the southern tradition and Yellammā, consecrated as the female head were integrated in a gradual process. The worship of the head inside the temple and of the trunk at the entrance occurs in many south Indian shrines and is mostly associated with the legend of Reṇukā and Paraśurāma.[113] There are instances of other goddesses being represented either as severed heads or torsos, like Chinnamastā, Lajjāgaurī, Ekavīrā.[114] Mariammā at the folk and Bhūdevī at shastraic level represents cults of torso worship. A crucial link in this context was provided by the Yellammā cult, which had a close association with anthill worship. Although it was not recorded by any Purāṇa, it is known from folk traditions.[115] It is important to note that the Reṇukā of north was primarily worshipped as the goddess of anthills and not a goddess represented by only a head. Since Yellammā was also worshipped as the goddess of anthills, it became easy for the northern settlers in the south to project both goddesses as the same. Since Yellammā was also worshipped as a female head, a similar feature was attributed to Reṇukā, too, and perhaps then the matricide myth became inevitable. Once this identification between Reṇukā and Yellammā was established, many other kinds of integration started taking place. For example, in south India, on the occasion of the ritual marriage of *devadāsīs* to Yellammā, they carry a basket in which the images of Reṇukā and Paraśurāma are placed.[116] Reṇukā shrines of southwestern India are associated with the rituals performed by the community of *devadāsīs*.

Yellammā is one of the mother goddesses, who has retained her own independent cult. The association with a male god or with a sage of brahmanical literature has not essentially touched her original cult, even though Yellammā is treated as equivalent to Reṇukā, the wife of *ṛṣi* Jamadagni. The story of her son Paraśurāma's killing her at his father's command reflects the mythological plane the conflict between different sets of ideas.[117]

Mariammā and Yeḷḷammā had also been separate entities like Reṇukā. Thus Mariammā and Yeḷḷammā had different kinds of beasts offered to them for sacrifice.[118]

The overlap of Reṇukā, Yeḷḷammā and Mariammā cults proved detrimental to the evolution of this group of deities, which is well reflected in the narratives of *Sthala Purāṇa*. According to one of the versions recorded by Whitehead,[119] Mariammā [not Reṇukā] was the mother of Paraśurāma and the wife of Jamadagni. When Paraśurāma was taking her into the wilderness for execution, she met a pariah women who embraced her in sympathy. In order to carry out the orders of his father Paraśurāma had to cut the head of both women and while bringing them back to life, he exchanged the heads of the two. This was how a pariah body was worshipped afterward as Mariammā and a brahman body as the goddess Yeḷḷammā. There are several other myths, which try to rationalise how the worship of only the torso or the head came about. Therefore the myth of Reṇukā's severed head came in handy to provide an explanation of already established practice of head worship in the cult of some mother goddesses of south India. It seems that various local goddesses south of the Narmadā got identified with Reṇukā due to similarity between the severance motif in the myth and the two-fold sculptures, or the image of the goddesses, viz. trunkless head and headless lower body with prominent generative organ, i.e. *yoni*, the latter also being nude.[120] In addition to these, brahmanical texts pushed the myth of head severing into the service of propagation of their ideology of *varṇāśramadharma* and projected the ideal of a faithful wife and obedient son.

In the process of the integration of Yeḷḷammā into the Reṇukā cult, the personality of Reṇukā also underwent a massive change. She is transformed from a meek and weak lady projected as the wife of a *ṛṣi* and mother of Paraśurāma into an assertive goddess who fights wars with demons. Friedhelm Hardy has illustrated the different portrayals of these goddesses by taking three types of sources for consideration, namely poems in rural Marathi dialect, *Sthala Purāṇas* and classical Purāṇas. Some of the popular Marathi

poems suggest a totally autonomous goddess figure: unmarried, childless, and in full control over god and demons, although even here she is called Yellammā or Reṇukā. One also finds other poems in which Yellammā has a son called Parsu, Parsarāma or Paraśurāma. It is this son who creates trouble for her and challenges her authority. One of the problems is that the son here is "fatherless". This is how she explains it in one poem: "When Śiva's daughter had gone to play, I gave my blessings to those six girls. For that I received you from them, without a husband, when I asked them for a child. Thus I have no husband, and you no father."[121] However, this also symbolises a symbiosis in which while Reṇukā provided acceptance of Yellammā in Sanskritic tradition and Yellammā gave Reṇukā an entry into folk tradition. This is how dialogue and correspondences between the so-called little and great traditions were carried out in the Indian subcontinent.

Who was responsible for this amalgamation of deities and mythical personalities? It appears to be the work of the same group of people that was behind the land reclamation myth of Paraśurāma. In fact, a closer look at cult centres reveal that the predominance of Reṇukā over Yellammā is limited to those areas where agrarian and brahmanic communities coexist with pastoral population. In those areas where brahmanic presence was low, Reṇukā's participation in mythical narrative is also lower in the same proportion. Dhānger and Gāvli myths of Maharashtra illustrate such assertion. It seems that regional cult centres of Yellammā developed only with the participation of both traditions and at those places where such interactions were restricted, Yellammā shrines remained a local institution. But why did the worshippers of Paraśurāma promote Reṇukā even at the cost of Paraśurāma himself? Only because the Paraśurāma cult was at that time converted into a religious order that reflected the agrarian interest; however, it could not appeal to pastoral and marginal people. It was easier for them to forge a relationship with the local population on the basis of the similarities between the Reṇukā–Yellammā myths. Moreover, this growth of the Reṇukā cult did not uproot

the cult of Paraśurāma in that region. After being assigned a secondary place, his cult also gained a new social base and, therefore, this arrangement proved to be mutually beneficial. This mutually beneficial relationship can be demonstrated through Paraśurāma's presence in many centres of the Reṇukā cult. For instance, Mahurgarh in Maharashtra, which is a famous Reṇukā *kṣetra,* has the *samādhi* of Jamadagani and a Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa apart from her renowned temple. It is said that the ashram of Dattātreya the guru of Jamadagni was also situated here. Jamadagni, as mentioned earlier, came to this place as ordered by his guru along with his wife Reṇukā and took his *samādhi* here with her.[122]

The Chandavad village in Nasik District has a pond and temple in the name of Reṇukā, which is also called *Reṇukā tīrtha.* The temple of Reṇukā is a modern construction, but it contains two interesting images of wood symbolising Reṇukā/Yellammā and Paraśurāma, lying in the inner courtyard and much daubed with red paint. The British compiler of the gazetteer thought that "they both appear to be Roman Catholic images, one representing the Annunciation and the other St. Anna with the infant Virgin on her knee, but it now bears the name of a Hindu goddess and serves as such".[123] Chiplun which is primarily a Paraśurāma *kṣetra,* also has a small temple of Reṇukā. There is a water spring in the vicinity of this temple. Further ahead, on the top of the hill there is a small temple of Dattātreya as well.[124]

Karnataka has many important Reṇukā shrines and at most of her famous cult centres images of Paraśurāma and Jamadagni are also worshipped. For example, Saundatti in Karnataka, which is one of the most famous cult centres of Reṇukā, worshipped as Yellammā in this locality, has a sacred pond called Rāmatīrtha as well as temples of Jamadagni and Paraśurāma.[125] At Chiknayakahalli also there is an important temple of Paraśurāma, Reṇukā, Jamadagni. In this temple the village goddess [*grāma-devate*], Hirimāvarada Yellammā is represented by a wooden figure, which is also known as Reṇukādevi, with a stone head set up in front. The processional image of this temple is a wooden figure

of Paraśurāma. To the right of Yeḷḷammā is a seated stone figure, about one feet high, of Jamadagni, with the right hand in the *abhaya mudrā* and the left placed on the thigh.[126] Similar is the case of Badami and Chandragutti, Ugargol, etc. where Paraśurāma is worshipped both independently and along with Reṇukā/Yeḷḷammā.

In Tamil Nadu, the Padaividu temple of Reṇukāmbal contains in the niches not only the figure of Reṇukā but of Paraśurāma and Jamadagni as well.[127] There are many modern Yeḷḷammā temples reported from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh which provide a different picture. For example, such shrines of Tamil Nadu are located at Kalipi in [Penukonda district],[128] Nochi Kuppam [Mylapore],[129] Devaraya Mudali Street [Jam Bazar, Madras City],[130] Reddipet [Kancheepuram taluk],[131] Arianvoyal Village [Ponneri taluk],[132] etc. In Andhra Pradesh they are situated at Machupalle in Siddahavattam taluk [Cuddapah],[133] Rayadurga [Anantapur district],[134] Sirpur [Adilabad district],[135] Kosigi [Adoni taluk],[136] Manchala [Adoni taluk],[137] etc. But none of these temples have any image of Paraśurāma or Jamadagni; mostly the deity is known and worshipped as Yeḷḷammā only, not Reṇukā. It is also significant to note that the priest and patrons of most of these shrines belong to the lower castes, which highlights that the lower order could develop many of their shrines only in the modern period when some upward mobility happened in this section due to the development of the market economy and other modernising factors.

Temples of Reṇukā are not limited to south India, there are some in north India as well. In Nakuri village in tehsil Dunda of Uttarkashi district, on the right bank of the Bhagirathi river, there is a temple of Reṇukā Devi, who is widely worshipped in this part of the Himalayas.[138] The Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh seems to have been another important region for Reṇukā cult where one particular tehsil has been named after Reṇukā herself and is traditionally called Rainka. The most important cult centre among them is called Reṇukā tīrtha, centred around the Reṇukā lake. There is an important Reṇukā temple on the bank of this lake. As already pointed out, here too the shrines of Paraśurāma and Jamadagni exist at several places in the taluk. The Runakata village[139] in Uttar

Pradesh, which is also called Reṇukā *kṣetra* and Jind in Haryana[140] also has ritual centres related with Reṇukā, Jamadagni and Paraśurāma.

Many of the cult centres of Reṇukā show a close relationship with the Dattātreya cult in southwestern India. It seems that at some point of time, worshippers of the Reṇukā–Paraśurāma cult and the Dattātreya cult came closer to each other and forged a common identity. However, in this relationship Dattātreya had an upper hand. For example, at Nilagiri, which is one of the three hills around Tryambakeshwara, there is a temple of the goddess Nilambika/Reṇukā as well as a temple of Guru Dattātreya.[141] Even at Saundatti, Mahurgarh and Uttarkashi, Dattātreya temples accompany that of Reṇukā. Many *Sthala Purāṇas* and other texts highlight this Dattātreya–Reṇukā relationship, in which Dattātreya is projected as the protector of Reṇukā and the guru of Paraśurāma. In the Dattātreya tradition, Reṇukā is projected as Tripurasundarī and other forms of Devī. Perhaps through this linkage the Paraśurāma cult also entered the world of tantricism, which is discussed below.

Although the cult of Jamadagni is not as widespread as that of Reṇukā; the Himalayas have provided some important shrines of this sage. These shrines give us the impression that some of the communities in this part of India also worshipped Jamadagni. His temple has been reported from Gulan Dara in Himachal Pradesh.[142] But the most important temple dedicated to him is in Baijnatha in the Kangra valley of Uttaranchal.[143] J.Ph. Vogel had described this temple while giving an extensive report on the ancient monuments of Kangra.[144] This temple had attracted the attention of many other scholars, like Cunnigham, Fergusson and Burgess for a long time.[145] The Baijnath temple stands in the middle of an enclosure of irregular shape, about 120 ft. in length and 60 to 75 feet. in width. The Jamadagni temple is said to have all the features of a very old temple, namely, simplicity of outline, non-repetition of designs, and the whole surface of the upper part covered with that peculiar horse-shoe diaper. The *āmalaka* string courses are subdued and the crowning ornaments are well proportioned.[146]

Uttaranchal has some important Jamadagni shrines. For example, Than village in tehsil Badkot of Uttarkashi district has many temples. But the main shrine of this village is famous as the temple of Sage Jamadagni. According to popular tradition, Jamadagni established a hermitage here and performed penance at this place. Behind the main temple is a modern Śiva temple where many old stone sculptures are placed. Apart from these, there are some other old temples in the vicinity. This Jamadagni temple is in pure hill style and similar to those Mahāsu temples which are constructed in the Yamuna and Tons valleys. In the sanctum of this temple are placed various masks and stone sculptures of the Sage Agastya, Śiva-Pārvatī, Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa and the Sun god which are worshipped.[147]

Gangani village in tehsil Bhatawari of Uttarkashi also has a temple dedicated to Sage Jamadagni. Near this temple there is a hot water spring called Ṛṣi Kuṇḍa, which has been converted into a tank for the facility of bathers. It is considered a sacred duty by the pilgrims going to Gangotri to bathe in this tank. Gangani is a halting place on the way to Gangotri and it is about 72 km from Uttarkashi.[148]

At Jamani, 20 km west of Safidion near Jind, west of Panipat there is a temple and tank dedicated to Jamadagni. People bathe in the tank on Sundays, the Pūrnamāśīs and 15th of every month.[149] Similarly, Puṣkara near Jind is also believed to be the *tapobhūmi* of Jamadagni. There is a big lake on the bank of which a Śiva temple is also situated. Rakhigarhi in Hissar district of Haryana is also connected with Jamadagni, who is said to have his ashram in the vicinity. The sage is supposed to have been killed here. It is believed that Paraśurāma washed his axe in a nearby tank, which later came to be known as Ramahṛda.The tank is located at Ramrai in Jind district.[150] A Jamadagni *kuṇḍa* exists at Sambhal in the Moradabad district also and it is supposed to be a place where Jamadagni performed his penance.[151]

Jamadagni is worshipped as Jamalu in the Kullu region and Paraśurāma in outer Seraj and Shimla regions. However, it should be noted that Jamadagni is not alone in being worshipped as a

sage in the Himalayas. Agastya muni in Kullu and Kathpaul mountain in Solan district, Atri at Dattanagar in Shimla, Kapil in Sirmaur, Kaśyapa in Sunni and Chamba, Gautama in Ghosal village of Kullu, Lahul and some other places, Vasiṣṭha at a village near Manali, Vyāsa at Bilaspur, Rohtang and Kullu, Nārada in Kullu and outer Seraj areas, Bhṛgu in Karsog, Mārkaṇḍeya in Bilaspur and Hamirpur, etc. are also known to have blessed these various areas.[152]

6. Paraśurāma and Tantricism

Tantricism has influenced almost all religions and cults of medieval India and the Paraśurāma cult is no exception to this trend. However, there is no reference to any distinct tantric sect worshipping Paraśurāma as a deity. But it seems that a section of the tantric Śrīvidyā sect was trying to associate Paraśurāma with their own narratives, perhaps to gain wider social acceptance in southwestern India. Therefore, Paraśurāma was projected as the author of tantric texts and the user of tantric rituals and formula in some of the Śrīvidyā and associated texts. The most important of them are *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra* and *Tripura Rahasya*. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* also presents Paraśurāma as the practitioner of tantric practices related to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa sect.

The first part of *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra* contains the *sūtra* with *Vṛitti* by Rāmeśvara while the second part deals with *Nityotsava* composed by Umanandanātha. It is a digest of Śrīvidyā tantra, i.e. a system of worship of the divine mother. The first part contains ten chapters dealing in minute detail with various means and methods of worship related to the cult, while the second part or the *Nityotsava* has seven chapters. This is seen as a valuable text by the followers of Śakti and other allied cults.[153] This text is divided into ten *khaṇḍas* beginning with *dīkṣāvidhi*, i.e. discourse on the selection of appropriate *śiṣyas* and the method of his initiation. The second *khaṇḍa* gives the details related to the worship of Gaṇeśa who is first propitiated before beginning any major task. From the third to the eighth chapter are descriptions of rituals and mantras for appeasing the supreme female principle

consecrated as Śrī, Lalitā, Śyāmā, Varāhī and Parā. These chapters are named Śrīkramaḥ, Lalitākramaḥ, Lalitānavavaranapūjā, Śyāmākramaḥ, Varāhīkramaḥ and Parākramaḥ. The ninth chapter, Homavidhi deals with the methods of performing tantric rituals. Finally, the tenth chapter describes various other kinds of *vidyā* for the propitiation of many other goddesses named as Sarvasādhāraṇakramaḥ. There are many tantric texts which are written in the form of dialogues between Śiva–Pārvatī or the sages.[154] However the *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra* does not follow that style. The text gives full credit of composition to Paraśurāma who has been designated as *Mahākaulācārya*,[155] i.e. the great tantric guru. Its linkage with Kaulism, a tantric school of Kashmir Śivaism and with some other regions of north India also deserves notice in this context.

It is also significant that Paraśurāma is called *Mahādevapradhānaśiṣya* in this text. As has been noted in the second chapter, Śivaism constantly tried to integrate Paraśurāma as a sage and *bhakta* of Śiva, in contrast to Viṣṇuism, which attributed divinity to him. Therefore, *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra* seems to be the composition of such a group of people who had a linkage with the Paraśurāma tradition on the one hand and Śivaism on the other and constantly tried to bring the Paraśurāma tradition within the ambit of Śivaism. The journey from Śivaism to tantricism was a logical step in the medieval milieu. It is also possible that the Bhṛgus had a role in the development of the Śrīvidyā sect, as they are mentioned at several places in the mantra of goddesses.[156] Perhaps by medieval times, Paraśurāma had become a widely accepted symbol of the Bhṛgu tradition and several achievements of the mythical Bhṛgu, Jamadagni and other Bhārgavas were attributed to Paraśurāma. In the same spirit, Paraśurāma is attributed the authorship of this text. Thus, it is quite clear that attributing authorship had a social message inherent in it and it was not a meaningless exercise.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* has a strong influence of Śivaism, but a significant space is also given to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult. Paraśurāma is shown as defeating Kārtavīrya with the help of a

magical formula and a *kavacha* drawing its efficacy from Kṛṣṇa, [see chapter four]. The latter half of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* contains the voluminous text of Lalitā Māhātmya, which reflects that the bearers of the Paraśurāma's cultic tradition were also closely associated with the sect of the tantric goddess Lalitā.

The interaction of the Paraśurāma-Reṇukā cult with Dattātreya resulted in the development of a distinct sect of tantricism centred around the goddess Tripura, also known as Lalitā, who is believed to be a form of Śrī-Lakṣmī or the supreme female principle. A tantric text called *Tripura Rahasya* highlights Paraśurāma's association with the tantric discourse in a significant manner in which Dattātreya teaches the *Śākta advaita* to Paraśurāma. *Tripura Rahasya* is a late medieval text composed in south India. This text shows a close relationship with *Datta Saṃhitā*, another text related to Dattātreya. It is said that the *Tripura Rahasya* is a shorter version of *Datta Saṃhitā* which was abridged by Paraśurāma in six thousand *sūtras* from its original eighteen thousand *sūtras* composed by Dattātreya. Further down the line, a disciple of Paraśurāma called Sumedha again shortened it to produce the text which is available to us. This text is divided into three sections, called Māhātmyakhaṇḍa, Gyānakhaṇḍa and Charyākhaṇḍa. The last section, is now lost and it is believed that it might have been similar to that of the *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra*.[157] The text is composed in the usual style of dialogue which takes place at one level between Haritāyaṇa and Nārada recalling the original dialogue between Paraśurāma and Dattātreya. This has been transmitted by a series of gods and sages like Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Durvāsā, Agastya, Lopāmudrā and last, Sage Saṃvarta, who passed it to Dattātreya. Just like the *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra*, the *Tripura Rahasya* also elaborates upon doctrines and practices of Śrīvidyā and Śrī Chakra.

Māhātmyakhaṇḍa narrates that Paraśurāma could not understand the teachings of Saṃvarta on *ātman* and the nature of the goddess Tripura. Then Saṃvarta advised him to go to Dattātreya for enlightenment. Dattātreya appeared before Paraśurāma as a tantric guru surrounded by other yogins and embracing a young

woman with a jar full of liquor put before him. Paraśurāma overlooked all the superficial appearances and appealed to Dattātreya for supreme knowledge. Similar stories are narrated about Dattātreya in the *Mārkaṇḍeya, Padma* and several other Purāṇas[158] where he is portrayed as the great yogin addicted to sensual pleasure but not affected by it. Dattātreya explained various aspects of his doctrine through stories and illustrations to Paraśurāma.

What might have been the purpose of attributing the authorship of a text to cultic entities and mythical figures like Paraśurāma and Dattātreya? There may be two factors either acting separately or in association with each other. The first reason may be that the tradition of Dattātreya and Paraśurāma was roped in by the propounders of Śrīvidyā tantra with a basic aim to facilitate the spread of this sect of tantricism among the followers of Paraśurāma and Dattātreya in southwestern India which was a stronghold of both these cultic figures. Alternatively, it could be explained in terms of the Paraśurāma cult trying to maintain its existence by adopting various measures like association with the non-Sanskritic mother goddess cults of south India. The same agenda was being pursued through association with Sanskritic goddesses of tantric cults. The expansion of agriculture has been linked with the cults of mother goddesses as well as tantricism.[159] Perhaps the changing nature of the mode of production among the followers of these cults also motivated them to associate themselves with tantricism. Therefore, the inspiration for such alliances might have come either from inside the Paraśurāma cult or from the outside through the initiative of other cults or both at the same time. But, whatever may be the case, it was an important mechanism for the survival of the Paraśurāma cult. Like all other sects, the cult of Paraśurāma also existed in relationship with other contemporary sects, and religious orders.

Footnotes

1 *Padma Purāṇa* VI. 45. 55–63.

2 *Varāha Purāṇa* I. 44.

3 *Varāha Purāṇa* I. 48.

4 *Nārada Purāṇa* IV. 119.14–19.

5 *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 13.83–86, G.P. 13. 84–86 pp. 5726–42.

6 *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 13.61.31; G.P. 13.62.34, pp.5666.

7 *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, 2.3.47.6–23.

8 *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 3. 81.22, G.P. 3. 83. 24–43, 1182–83.

9 *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, XVI, 1908, p. 26; *Rajasthan District Gazetteer*, Chittaurgarh District, 1977, p. 406.

10 M.C.Behera, *Pilgrimage Centre Parashurama Kunda*, p. 48.

11 A.J.T. Jackson, *Folklore of Konkan*, p.6.

12 Sukhdeva Singh Charak, *Himachal Pradesh*, pp.137–38.

13 Bansi Lal Sharma, *Himachal Lok Sanskriti ke Srot*, p.157.

14 Padma Chandra Kashyap, *Himachali Sanskriti ka Itihas*, pp.57.

15 Sukhdeva Singh Charak, *Himachal Pradesh*, pp.140.

16 *Parohaḍ or Prohaḍa* is an old text whose manuscripts are available only with some brahman families of Nirmanda and Niratha villages of Himachal Pradesh. These texts contain an account of the world since the first *bhuṇḍa* was allegedly performed by Paraśurāma. *Parohada* describes that in *tretāyuga* fifty brahmanic settlements were established by Paraśurāma in this area. Therefore, it has some similarity with *Grāmapaddhati* of Karnataka.

17 Padma Chandra Kashyapa, *Himachali Sanskriti ka Itihas*, pp. 53–59.

18 *Himachal District Gazetteer*, Sirmur District, 1969, pp.326–27.

19 *Atharvaveda*, II. 32. Bloomfield, *SBE*, XLII, p.23.

20 A.T.M. Jackson, *Folklore of Konkan*, pp.1–2, 17.

21 M.J. Walhouse, "The Kashis of Paraśurāma"; *IA*, III, July 1874, p.191.

22 *Junagadh District Gazetteer*, 1975, p. 262; Syed Siraj ul Hassan, *The Castes and Tribes of H.E.H The Nizam's Dominions*, p.60–65; *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency* IX, part I, p.117.

23 M.S.Mate, *Temples and Legends of Maharashtra*, pp.117–119.

24 M.C. Behera, *Pilgrimage Centre Parashurama Kunda*, pp. 45–46.

25 H.A. Rose, "Hinduism in the Himalayas", *IA*, XXXV, September, 1906, pp. 244–245.

26 *Himachal District Gazeteer*, Sirmur District, 1965, pp.130, 365–66.

27 C.R.B.Lalit, "Thodā: A Martial Game of the Khasa People of Himachal Pradesh", in K.S.Singh, ed. *The Mahābhārata in the Tribal and Folk Traditions of India*, pp. 72–73.

28 *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.106; U.P.District Gazetteer, Agra District, 1965, p.397.

[29] Op.cit. p.258.

[30] Op.cit.,

[31] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.86.

[32] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, XVI, p.26.

[33] A.T.M. Jackson, op.cit., p.6.

[34] M.S.Mate, *Temples and Legends of Maharashtra*, pp.118–119.

[35] Gopal Krishna Kanehere, *Temples of Maharashtra*, pp. 23–25.

[36] Annual Report of Mysore Archaeological Survey, 1918, p14; Mysore State Gazetteer, Tumkur District,1969, 573–74.

[37] *Karnataka District Gazetteer*, Hassan District, 1971 pp. 654, 872.

[38] *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteer*, Cuddapah District, p.728–29.

[39] *Census of India*, 1961,VII, Kerala, Part VII B[ii].

[40] R. Champakalaksmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in Tamil Country*, p.115; Kalpana S. Desai, *Iconography of Viṣṇu*, p. 112.

[41] T.A.Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, I, p.186, Kalpana S. Desai, op.cit. 112.

[42] *Vaikhānasāgama*, 60, 5–6.

[43] R.Champakalaksmi, op.cit., p.116.

[44] *Viṣṇudharmmotaram*, III, 61–62, 85.

[45] *Agni Purāṇa* 49.5.

[46] *Vaikhānasāgama*, Patala, 59, p.200.

[47] *Skanda Purāṇa* II, ix, 27. 27–28; III, i, 22.18 ii; A.B.L. Awasthi, *Studies in Skanda Purāṇa*, part IV, p.134.

[48] *Agni Purāṇa*, 42. 24–25.

[49] K.B. Dave, *Gujaratanu Murti Vidhana*, p.203, quoted in Kalpana S.Desai, op.cit. p. 113.

[50] Urmila Agrawal, *Khajuraho Sculptures and their Significance*, p.29 Kalpana S.Desai, p.113; A.B.L. Awasthi, op.cit. p.134.

[51] Kalpana S. Desai, op.cit. p. 113.

[52] N.K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, p.107.

[53] *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report* 1932, p. 30.

[54] Ibid, p.23.

[55] Ibid, p.32.

[56] *Parvatiya Purattatava Ikayi, Sarvekshan Report*, Almora, 1981–83, p. 38.

[57] Q.M.Moneer, "A Note on Two Images of Unusual Type Found in the Bombay

Presidency", *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, 1936–37, p.152–53.

58 *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1937, pp. 28–34.

59 *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1923, pp. 5–6.

60 Ibid, 1933, p.86.

61 Ibid, 1936, p.30.

62 R. Champakalaksmi, op.cit., p.113–14.

63 Niharranjan Ray, *Brahmanical Gods in Burma: A Chapter of Indian Art and Archaeology*, pp. 41–42.

64 Ibid, pp. 80.

65 *Parvatiya Purattatva Ikai, Sarvekshan Report*, 1981–83, Almora 8, 20, 38, 52.

66 *Pinder Ghati Ka Purattatvik Servekshan*, Chamoli, Part II, 1988–89 p.18.

67 *U.P. District Gazetteer*, Chamoli District, 1979, p. 17.

68 *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1945, p.39.

69 Ibid, 1941, p.28.

70 Ibid, 1920, p.3.

71 Ibid, 1920, p.3.

72 N.K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, pp. 89, 92–94.

73 *Katayur Ghati Ka Purattatvik Sarvekshan*, Almora, 1984–85, p.5.

74 *Parvatiya Puratattva Ikai, Sarvekshan Report*, 1980–81Almora p. 38, 56. 72.

75 *ASI, Eastern Circle Report*, 1905–6, pp. 21–22.

76 *ASI, Western Circle Report*, 1903–4, Photograph no. 2265.

77 *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1937, p.37.

78 Ibid, 1932, p.36.

79 *ASI, Western Circle Report*, 1920, pp. 83–85.

80 R.D. Tripathi, *Temples of Pratīhāra Period in Central India*, *ASI*, 1990, p.165.

81 Ibid. pp. 36, 145.

82 *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1936, pp. 37–38.

83 S.L Nagar, *Temples of Himachal Pradesh*, pp. 86–87.

84 *Pinder Ghati Ka Sarvekshan Report*, 1987–88, p.10.

85 A.B.L. Awasthi, *Studies in the Skanda Purāṇa, IV, Brahmanical Art and Iconography*, p.117.

86 Henery Cousens, *Somanātha and Other Mediaeval Temples in Kathiawad*, ASI, 1931, 1998 [Reprint] pp. 38–39.

[87] *ASI Annual Report, Baroda State*, 1939, p. 9.

[88] *ASI, Eastern Circle Report*, 1911–12, p.41.

[89] *ASI, Western Circle Report*, 1908, p.5.

[90] Ibid, 1912–13, p. 20.

[91] Ibid, 1905, p.6.

[92] *ASI, Annual Report*, 1904–5, p.119.

[93] *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report* 1937, pp.26–27.

[94] Ibid, 1943, p. 28, 35.

[95] R.D. Tripathi, *Temples of Pratīhāra Period in Central India*, ASI, 1990, p. 35.

[96] *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report* 1933, pp.73–74.

[97] Ibid, 1941–42, p.42.

[98] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.65.

[99] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.232.

[100] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.221.

[101] *ASI, Western Circle Report*, 1905, p.45.

[102] *ASI, Western Circle Report*, 1905, p.45.

[103] *Garuḍa Purāṇa* III. 28. 64–65.

[104] *Garuḍa Purāṇa* is believed to have been composed somewhere around Mithila region of Bihar. Cf. S.C. Banerji, *Studies in the Mahāpurāṇa*, p. 32 in Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation*, p.11.

[105] Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, *Pastoral Deities in Western India* p. 32, 55.

[106] Ibid, p. 55–56.

[107] *Mahābhārata*, C.E. 3.81. 139; G.P. 3.82.82, p.1178.

[108] *Skanda Purāṇa* II. 1.9.60.

[109] S.A. Dange, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myth*, p 390.

[110] *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* I. 1.3.4; *Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā*. 19.2 *Maitryaṇī Saṃhitā* I.6.3 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* VI. 3.3.5 quoted in Dange,op.cit. p. 391.

[111] Gunther-Deitz Sontheimer, op.cit. p.133–4, 188, 198. See entries in index on Anthill, Termite hill.

[112] D.D. Kosambi, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 42–81.

[113] Gunther-Deitz Sonthiemer, op.cit. p. 25n.

[114] S.A.Dange, op.cit. pp. 404, 408.

[115] Ibid. p. 392.

[116] Ibid p. 401.

[117] Gunther-Deitz Sonthiemer, op.cit. pp. 55–56.

[118] S.A. Dange, op.cit., p. 392.

[119] H. Whitehead, The *Village Gods of South India*, p. 116.

[120] S.A. Dange, op.cit. p.404.

[121] Friedhelm Hardy, "Information and Transformation: Two Faces of the Purāṇas", in Wendy Doniger, *Purāṇa Perennis*, p. 174.

[122] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.238.

[123] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, X, p 167; *Kalyāṇa, Tīrthāṅka*, p. 251.

[124] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p. 249.

[125] S.A. Dange, op.cit. p. 403.

[126] *Mysore State Gazetteer*, Tumkur District, 1969, pp. 573–74.

[127] R. Champakalakshmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in Tamil Country*, p.115.

[128] *Archaeological Report*, Madras 1886, Government of Madras, Public Works Department, Adayar, Kottur; Census of India, 1961, XI, Part-XI-D, p. 207.

[129] *Census of India*, 1961, XI, Part-XI-D, p.204.

[130] Ibid, p. 199.

[131] Ibid, p. 107.

[132] Ibid, p.15.

[133] *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteer, Cuddhapah District*, 1967, p.767.

[134] Ibid, *Anantpur District*, 1970, p.894.

[135] Ibid, *Adilabad District*, 1976, p. 197.

[136] Ibid, *Kurnool District*, 1974, p. 237.

[137] Ibid, *Kurnool District*, 1974, p. 238.

[138] *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteer*, Uttarkashi District, 1979, p.154.

[139] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka p. 106; *U.P. District Gazetteer*, Agra District, 1965, p. 397.

[140] *Haryana District Gazetteer*, Jind District, 1986, pp. 42, 258.

[141] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.248.

[142] H.L. Nagar, *Temples of Himachal Pradesh*, p. 212.

[143] *EI* I, p.97n.; II,482.

[144] J.Ph. Vogel, *ASI, Annual Report*, 1905–6, pp.17–25.

[145] Cunnigham, *Archaeological Survey Reports*, V, p. 178; Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 1899, p. 314.

[146] *ASI, Annual Report*, 1905–6, pp. 17–25.

[147] *Parvatiya Puratattva Ikai, Sarvekshan Report*, Almora, 1981–83.

[148] *U.P. District Gazetteer*, Uttarkashi District, 1979, pp.152–53.

[149] H.A.Rose, "*A note on the Kuruksetra*", *IA*, XXXIII, p. 298.

[150] *Haryana District Gazetteer*, Hissar District, 1987, p. 261.

[151] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.94.

[152] B.R. Sharma, "Impact of the *Mahābhārata* on the Folk and Tribal Culture of Himachal Pradesh", in K.S.Singh, *Mahābhārata in the Folk and Tribal Tradition*, pp. 36–37.

[153] *IA*, 1926, LV, p.78.

[154] R. Shama Sastry, "The Origin of Devanagari Alphabet" *IA*, 1906. XXXV, p.258.

[155] This term has been used at the end of first chapter, however, at the end of other chapters another term is used in which he is called Mahākaulāchārya.

[156] *Paraśurāma Kalpa Sūtra*, I.III.18; I.V.9; I.VIII. 14; I.X. 27; I.X.32; I.X. 34.

[157] Antonio Rigopolos, *Dattātreya: The Immortal Guru, Yogin and Avatāra* p. 170.

[158] *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* 17. 18–25, *Padma Purāṇa* 2.103–104; 6.71.199–212, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.11.13; *Matsya Purāṇa* 43.15; *Agni Purāṇa* 4.14.

[159] cf. R.S. Sharma, "The Material Milieu of Tantricism", in R.S. Sharma and V.Jha, ed. *Indian Society, Historical Probings: Essays in Memory of D.D.Kosambi*, pp.175–89.

Chapter 7

Transmission of the Traditions

In the seond and third chapters it was argued that the circulation and perpetuation of the Paraśurāma myths were not limited to the Bhṛgus or brahmanical clans; rather, these were utilised by varied *varṇas* to fulfil their own socio-political agenda. They became a part of a larger cultural vocabulary and developed into tools of inter-community dialogues. Thus, their reflections may be seen in the narratives and traditions of the elite as well as the common people. Moreover, the evidence of the footprints of the Paraśurāma myths and cult may be identified clearly in the literary and archaeological sources of the ancient and early medieval periods. Therefore, oral accounts of several communities recorded by modern anthropologists may not necessarily be too recent in origin, despite having problems in dating them with any certainty. Given the nature of our literary sources, which largely reflect the elite world view, it is difficult to reconstruct the picture at the level of the common folk. Therefore, this chapter includes many significant data from anthropological studies in order to bridge the gap regarding myth's appropriation and perpetuation by diverse social segments, specially that of the lower strata for their agenda of caste, region and political legitimisation.

1. The Paraśurāma Myths in Folk Narratives

Folk narratives have a multiple functional agenda and perform

the task of providing a platform for both the haves and have-nots of society to share a common cultural idiom. It reflects people's role in the composition and propagation of mythic traditions. Therefore, the occurrence of the Paraśurāma legend in the folk narratives resonate not only popularity but its peculiar use at the grass roots level, where even a negative image is also utilised to embolden the image of a caste, place or a political rule.

Gujarat provides an interesting version of the Paraśurāma myth in which common folk have reinterpreted and reconstructed it to reflect their own worldview and secure sanctity for their geographical entity. This myth comes from village Ran in Kalyanpur taluk, which is situated near the river Dhandh that is famous for its clay. This village created a myth that tried to explain the reason why that river was called Dhandh, which means 'corpse-washer' in the local dialect. According to a legend, the village is linked with the mythological story of Sage Jamadagni and his wife Reṇukā. Once Menukā, Reṇukā's sister, with her husband Sahasrārjuna, a king of northern India, on his way to Dwarka encamped at Ran, Reṇukā wished to meet her sister and expressed this desire to Jamadagni. Jamadagni reluctantly gave his consent and with his magical power provided her with a costly dress and chariot drawn by splendid horses. Sahasrārjuna jestingly asked Reṇukā to provide his entire camp with entertainment the very next day. Jamadagni propitiated Indra and obtained all necessary supplies from his cow *Kāmadurgā*. On hearing about the power of the cow, Sahasrārjuna demanded the cow, but was refused. He tried to take away the cow by force. But there issued from the cow many *asuras* who defended it. A great battle ensued and many fell on both sides. Meanwhile, the *ṛṣi*'s son Paraśurāma returned home. Jamadagni asked him to kill Reṇukā, his mother, who according to him was responsible for all the troubles. Paraśurāma did so and he also killed Sahasrārjuna and routed his army. Jamadagni was pleased by the act of Paraśurāma and restored Reṇukā to life. The river near the place was flooded with blood and corpses due to the battle with Sahasrārjuna. So the river from the spot where it crosses the high road to Dwarka, towards the sea is called Dhandh or corpse-washer.[1]

The most significant aspect in this version lies in those subtle changes through which the story is brought down to the level of the common folk, their lifestyle and concerns. For example, here the emphasis is on the sibling envy and the typical male response in the average Indian family, holding women responsible for everything that goes wrong in their affairs. The myth of Kārtavīrya annihilation and beheading of Reṇukā are jumbled together and instead of Reṇukā being punished for being late for Jāmdagni's daily rituals, she is held responsible for the mess emerging out of her insistence on inviting her sister to the feast. Therefore the matricide myth is interpreted in a different light. Second, here the simple sacrificial cow becomes a magical cow having wish fulfilling powers. As noted in the second chapter, gradually in the Purāṇas too, the nature of the cow changes from a simple animal to a divine cow. The transition might have taken place due to these kinds of folk interpretations of narratives. This is another significant example of the back and forth movement of myths between folk and Sanskrit traditions, as mentioned in earlier chapters.

H.A. Rose has recorded a similar narrative in the Rainka tehsil of Himachal Pradesh. It says: "Jamdaggan's wife, Rainkāji, had a sister Bainkā, who was married to King Sahasrabāhu and once when the *ṛṣi* celebrated a *jag*, Bainka asked Rainka to invite her to feast. Rainka begged the *ṛṣi* to do so, but at first he refused, because he could not afford to entertain a king and his queen. However, due to Rainka's repeated request, he yielded and asked the god Indra to grant him *Kāmadhenu*, [the cow of plenty], *Kalpavṛkṣa*, [the tree of paradise], which yielded all types of gifts and Kubera Bhaṇḍāri, the celestial steward who could supply all kinds of luxury. When the king arrived with all his court, the *ṛṣi* was thus enabled to entertain him sumptuously and the king was so mystified as to the source of the *ṛṣi*'s wealth that he deputed his barber to find out about it. Learning that the *Kāmadhenu* was the main source of supply, the king asked for the cow as a gift, which the *ṛṣi* refused and so the king determined to take her by force. The *ṛṣi*, however, sent her into the sky to Indra. Thereupon the king shot an arrow at the cow and wounded her in the foot. The cow returned and attacked

him. The king, attributing this to the *ṛṣi*'s sorcery, put him to death and returned home. Rainkā, taking the *ṛṣi*s body in her lap was lamenting on his death. Then she was divinely told that Kubera Bhaṇḍāri, had *amṛta*, or the elixir of life, and a drop of it placed in the dead *ṛṣi*'s mouth would bring him back to life. So the *ṛṣi* was restored to life and ordered his younger sons to kill Rainka, thinking that she had instigated his murder with the intention of marrying Sahasrabāhu, but they refused. Then the *ṛṣi* summoned Paras Rām, his eldest son, who was then practising austerities in the Konkan, who appeared instantly. Paras Rāma killed his mother, and as a consequence of the divine curse which fell upon him, went to the plains [*deśā*] meaning to kill all the Kshatriyas and to swim in their blood and dealing so with Sahasrabāhu, the cause of all his miseries. Waging his war of extermination against the kshatriyas he had reached Kurukṣetra, where Indra learnt what bloodshed he was causing in the fulfilment of his oath and sent rain until the water rose to the height of a man, and caused the upper currents to turn red. Meanwhile Jamadaggan had been searching for his son, and meeting him with his axe on his shoulders, was so pleased with his performance that he asked if he had any desire. Parasa Rāma in reply begged his father to restore his mother and brothers to life, and perform his mother's funeral rites. The *ṛṣi* replied that his wife and sons had become *jala swarūpa* or water and that the former was in the larger and latter in the smaller of the tanks at the Rainka."[2]

In this version, Reṇukā is not resurrected and Kubera, along with Indra, is given a larger role, which does not exist in the Puranic versions. Kubera has not only been specifically associated with the Himalayan region but his representations have also been found in several temples. Moreover, it is believed that Jamadagni lived and meditated at Rainka and Jamla in Sirmaur district. He is also said to have stayed at Tattapani in Shimla district on the bank of river Sutlej. At Tattapani, there were no hot water springs and the legend goes that Paraśurāma had promised his mother Reṇukā to come to her help when ever she remembered him. The sage Jamadagni had a *kāmadhenu* cow and once invited the ruler of

Sunni area to a *yajña*. Sahasrabāhu demanded the cow and when refused by the sage, forcibly tried to take her away. In the combat, the sage was killed. It was at this time that Reṇukā remembered Paraśurāma, who was taking a bath in a hot water spring at Manikaran in the Kullu region. On hearing the call of his mother, he at once rushed to Tattapani [hot water spring] in Shimla district. Since he came out of the hot water springs at once, some drops of hot water fell on the way to Tattapani and at Tattapani the drops so poured, was developed into a hot water spring.[3]

The Mishmis living in the present Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh came in contact with pilgrims visiting the Paraśurāma Kuṇḍa and therefore accommodated the legend of Paraśurāma in their own folklore with some changes. Mishmis are divided into two major groups, namely Digaru and Miju. In Digaru folklore, he is called Paraśurāma Karingama, who had a quarrel with his mother and killed her with his axe. His hand clung to the handle of the axe and full of regret, he wandered in many holy places to atone his sins and at last he reached this kuṇḍa. Here he saw water trickling down from a huge rock. He struck the rock with his axe, as a result water flowed down the handle and his hand became free. After that Paraśurāma Karingma stayed at that place, became a god and transformed himself into a formless being.[4]

The Miju Mishmis believe that Paraśurāma came here on the advice of his guru and became free from his sins. Then he stayed here forever and became a god and a formless being. Some believe that his soul got united with Burumai—the presiding deity of the place. So they worship Paraśurāma as Tailung Burumai. But when they worship Burumai they do not invoke the name of Paraśurāma in their rituals. These people also believe that Paraśurāma was the contemporary of King Kunfi, who is a prominent character of their folklore and who is believed to have built a temple of Kṛṣṇa at Bhismak Nagar. The Mishmis also believe that the huge rock lying in the river near Paraśurāma kuṇḍa is the axe of Paraśurāma. There are many other variants of this Mishmi folklore with which the Paraśurāma kuṇḍa and their traditional deities like Tapei and Talah are closely associated.[5]

Another tribe of the area, the Khampati, who live in the Namsai area, simultaneously profess Theravāda Buddhism and animism. These people have also adopted the matricide myth of Paraśurāma in their own narratives, which are similar to those of the Mishmis. The Deoris had been priests of the Chutiya kings of Assam and believe that they were appointed by Paraśurāma to perform expiatory rituals. The legend of Paraśurāma popular among the Deoris says that a brahmana had fought with his wife and he ordered his seven sons to kill her. None except the youngest named Paraśurāma followed the order and killed his mother with his axe. The handle of the axe stuck to his hand and he visited many holy places in order to get rid of this sin. In the course of his pilgrimage, he reached a brahmana's house and took shelter at his place in the night. There Paraśurāma overheard a cow and calf talking about the bad treatment meted out to them by that brahmana and also planning to kill him the next day in the field. In the morning, Paraśurāma followed the owner to the field and saw the cow killing the brahmana. Paraśurāma ran towards the cow to catch her but she ran away along with the calf and after crossing mountains and forests, she reached a *kuṇḍa*. She jumped into it and disappeared. Paraśurāma also entered the kuṇḍa and found that his hands were free from the axe. He made a passage for the water to come down. But after some time when the water did not stop, he started throwing water in the opposite direction, which resulted in a river going upstream, now known as the river Lohit. Paraśurāma in his anger went on throwing water further away and, therefore, the source of Lohit could not be traced. The Deoris believe Paraśurāma to be an avatāra of Rāma, but they neither worship him nor make a pilgrimage to the Paraśurāma *Kuṇḍa*.[6] Therefore, all the narratives of this region revolve around the origin myth of the river Lohit and Paraśurāma *Kuṇḍa* and present an example of a dialogue between Puranic narratives and folklore.

The story of Paraśurāma recounted at Pedhe in Maharashtra says that he was the son of a brahmana sage Jamadagni. Paraśurāma's mother and the wife of the great kshatriya king, Sahasrārjuna, were sisters. The sage Jamadagni was poor and his

wife was forced to do all the household chores herself. One day, while fetching water, she thought of her sister's grandeur and her own poverty. As she was thus thinking, she did not notice that the pitcher had become empty due to leakage, and when she told Jamadagni of the empty pitcher, he blamed her for comparing herself with her sister. She answered, "If I want to invite my sister there is hardly food for ten men." "I have," the sage said, "food for ten thousand, but I do not think that it is wise to call a kshatriya to dinner." She pleaded that they should be invited, and finally her sister and her husband was invited and arrived with a large following. From his wish-fulfilling cow and never-emptying jar the sage satisfied the king and all his men. Learning the source of the sage's bounty, the king carried off the cow and the jar, and killed the sage, forcing him to lie on a bed of pointed nails. Grieved with the result of her foolishness, the sage's wife committed suicide. Thus orphaned, Paraśurāma vowed vengeance on the kshatriyas. Attacking them with axe, *paraśu*, he broke their power, slew all who did not forfeit their birthright by mixing with shudras, and gave the whole of their land to the brahmanas. Finding that he had left no land for himself, he prayed to the sea, who then washed the Sahyādri cliffs, to provide him with a kingdom. The sea refused to move at first but Paraśurāma was determined to drive it back. Standing on the Sahayādri, he shot an arrow westward and the sea retired before it could be hit with the arrow. But the sea-god sent a friendly bee to bore Paraśurāma's bowstring, and the arrow fell short, only claiming about a 60 km wide strip.[7]

Consonant with the above-mentioned and other narratives, the Pedhe version also talks about Reṇukā's sister and identifies her as the wife of Sahasrārjuna. It is interesting to note that Puranic versions never allude to this relationship. Second, here the matricide is replaced by *sati*, which along with other elements such as land reclamation and the image of Paraśurāma as an orphan, gives treatment that is more sympathetic to his personality. In the narratives of the lower orders in some parts of south India, the act of matricide becomes the central axis of the myth.

For example, in one of the versions recorded by Whitehead, Mariammā [not Reṇukā] was the mother of Paraśurāma and the wife of Jamadagni. When she was found to be unchaste by the *ṛṣi,* he asked Paraśurāma to take her into the wilderness and cut off her head. When he took her to the appointed place, Mariammā met a pariah woman, and in her longing for sympathy she embraced her. So Paraśurāma cut off both their heads together and went back in great sorrow. His father promised him any reward he chose to ask in return for his obedience. Paraśurāma asked that his mother might be restored to life. The father gave him some water in a vessel and a cane, telling him to put his mother's head on her body, sprinkle the water on her and tap her with the cane. In his eager haste he put his mother's head on the body of the pariah woman and vice versa, and restored them both to life. The pariah body was worshipped afterward as Mariammā and the brahmana body as the goddess Yeḷḷammā. To Yeḷḷammā is sacrificed the buffalo; but to Mariammā only goats and cocks, not buffaloes.[8]

Both Elmore [1900-11] and Tapper [1971] have recorded Telugu folk narratives that link Pōta Rāju with Reṇukā. Elmore's account is more Sanskritic than Tapper's, in which Reṇukā is called Yeḷḷammā Devi. Elmore's account is woven around a version of the classical story of Reṇukā's beheading, at her husband's command, by their son Paraśurāma. When Reṇukā's father Dhandagiri Rāju's kingdom is beset by *rākṣasas,* the sage Nārada comes and tells the king that Reṇukā should undertake the fight against them. The king refuses and after being defeated, hides in a cave. Reṇukā learns about the plight of her father and his kingdom in a vision and determines to avenge the defeat. But on the way to ask permission from her husband, the great sage Jamadagni, she laughs in delight at the sight of a child. This disturbs Jamadagni's penance and is the pretext here for his irate command that Reṇukā be decapitated by their son, Paraśurāma. Brought back to life by Jamadagni at the demand of Paraśurāma, Reṇukā angrily displays her terrible form to her husband and then sets out on a mission to destroy the demons who had overrun her father's kingdom. Pōta Rāju, her brother, helps her in this annihilation by

not allowing a single drop of blood to fall on earth. He spreads his tongue over the ground as far as the kingdom of the demons extended.[9]

In Tapper's version, Ellamma's husband is Jansukamahāraju, involved in a penance with one crore Saṃnyāsīs. When Ellamma learnt that her parents have lost their kingdom in war and gambling to the Pattabhi kings, she somehow reached her husband during his penance and asked his permission to go to help them and promised to return the next morning. He asked how she could defeat the king when her father, a great warrior had failed. She told him to look away if he wanted to see her power, and then she appeared to him as a tigeress. He fainted and she awakened him and obtained a blessing and a boon. Then, with the help of Pōta Rāju, she defeated her foes and returned the kingdom to her parents. This second version provides a different shade of the Reṇukā mythology especially in the absence of the matricide theme. At that time Ellamma did not have a child who would kill her, but in future when one is born to her, both Reṇukā and Paraśurāma made repeated attempts to kill each other in this version of the myth.[10] The role of social institutions such as matriarchy or the general position of women and their rituals also play an important role in the making of the folk versions.

Sthalapurāṇas constitute a genre of writing, which represents late historical folk narratives and may be placed somewhere in between historical and anthropological records. Moreover, it also represents the brahmanisation of the folk narratives. Various such Purāṇas are available from south and eastern India, mostly outside the Ganga valley. The Alampur *Sthalapurāṇa* also falls in this category. Alampur is situated near the sacred confluence of the Tungabhadra and Krishna rivers on the border between Kurnool and Mahaboobnagar districts of Andhra Pradesh, it has a famous cult centre called Rajrajeshwari tīrtha. There are two goddesses at Alampur, who are described in the local *Sthalapurāṇa*. One is Yeḷḷammā, the *gramadevatā* and the other is Bhūdevī. The story behind these goddesses and the popular legend is as follows:

"Reṇukā was the faithful and chaste wife of *ṛṣi* Jamadagni. She had to bring water from the river Tungabhadra every day for her husband's *pūjā*. She used to make the pot in which she could bring sacred water with the clay from the river Tungabhadra. This power of moulding clay and sand into a pot was acquired by her due to the great power of her devotion to her husband. One day she beholds a king sporting in the river along with his wives. She gets attracted to the king and incurs impurity due to the unchaste behaviour. She lost thus her power to bring water in a wet clay pot and therefore could not bring water for the ritual performance of the *ṛṣi*. Jamadagni understood the reason for her inability to bring the water immediately and asked Paraśurāma to kill her. Paraśurāma executed his order instantly. Jamadagni became very happy and granted the opportunity of a boon to his son. Paraśurāma asked that his mother be brought back to life. Jamadagni told him that her head could not be attached to her body, as it had fallen in an impure place, however the sage granted her a boon that the head would be worshipped by all classes of people under the name of Yeḷḷammā, and the body would also be equally renowned and named Bhūdevī. Thus these two goddesses came to be situated at Alampur and these are not seen anywhere else except at Alampur."[11] As is clear from the story, the first part of the narrative is closer to the Akṛtavraṇa version of the *Mahābhārata*, although some new elements of the divine character of Reṇukā are introduced here. However, the second part is a totally new invention, which tries to rationalise the association of Reṇukā with Yeḷḷammā and Bhūdevī.

At Mahur this myth has another version, according to which when Paraśurāma asked his father to rejuvenate Reṇukā, Jamadagni directed him to cast her body and head in the sacrificial fire so that she may attain a divine body and lead Paraśurāma to Wadi Ratnagiri in Kolhapur district as was desired by her son. Paraśurāma followed the instruction and when Reṇukā came out with a divine body she asked her son to lead her to the desired place. But she warned him not to look back and that if he did, she would stop then and there, never thereafter would she meet him.

But on the way Paraśurāma had a desire to look back at her and he cast a glance at her. Reṇukā became angry and stopped there. She was covered up to the navel in a pit. The place came to be called Matapur or Mahur in the Nanded district of Maharashtra.

The *Sthalapurāṇa* of Mahur has another narrative, which begins with the conventional Puranic account and then adds a new story line that the sage is killed by the king and Reṇukā is mortally wounded. After killing the kshatriyas, Paraśurāma placed a yoke on his shoulder, with the corpse of his father in one of the containers hanging from it and his mother in the other one. He wandered through the country until he came to the hermitage of Dattātreya. There he cremated his father and his mother committed *sati*. Later she rises from the ground there; this is the origin of the temple of Mahur.[12]

Saundatti has yet another version, which narrates that as one head was severed by Paraśurāma, Reṇukā got another one in its place and the chain continued. But each time a head was cut, a disease spread till there was a number of such diseases. So Reṇukā got disgusted and decided to stay in the place where her head was severed. She made the place her home and stayed away from her husband and son permanently. That is why there are separate temples of Jamadagni and Paraśurāma at Saundatti.[13]

There are some Marathi folk poems that treat this myth very much along the lines of the Purāṇas. Reṇukā was married to the irate sage Jamadagni, who imposed an impossible task on her. Since she failed in it, the sage ordered Paraśurāma to cut off her head. In another Marathi tradition, Reṇukā/Yeḷḷammā is subdued and dominated by Kāla Bhairava. Here the narrative reaches a situation identical to that of the Purāṇas: powerless female, married to a cruel and irascible sage. Reṇukā is made famous merely by her son Paraśurāma. Another poem on Saundatti says that after Reṇukā had killed the local demon, she asked her son for water: "I am feeling so thirsty, my son. Before anything else, refresh me with water." Paraśurāma shot an arrow and brought the Ganga up from the *Pātāla* [underworld]. "Drink this water, mother."[14]

The study of these narratives can give us an idea about the depth of the interaction between Sanskritic and folk cultures at a given geographical location. The local traditions always adapted the Sanskritic narrative according their own necessity and added their own innovations freely. This also proves that Indian myths and traditions are not creations of only brahmans or upper castes; rather, these are composed and shaped by the participation of a far greater number of people belonging to all sections of society.

2. Place Myths

Sanctification of regions and spots has been one of the most important functions of myths. This is done through the invention of mythical events having taken place at that spot or associating it with visits of mythical beings. This also throws light on how the same event is reported to have taken place in different corners of the subcontinent. For example, there are numerous places which claim that Paraśurāma freed himself from the sins of matricide and his axe got unstuck to his hand at that particular place itself. Similarly, there are several villages which claim to be the birthplace of Paraśurāma or the ashram of Jamadagni, etc. For instance, the hills to the west of Kolar, called Sataśṛṅga Parvat or the hundred-peaked mountains, are made the scene of the story of Reṇukā and Paraśurāma and there the latter is said to have taken revenge from Kārtavīrya Arjuna, the murderer of his father Jamadagni. He committed this murder in order to obtain possession of Surabhi, the cow of plenty. The *kolāhala* or uproarious noise consequent to his feat is represented to have given the town its name, since then shortened into Kolar.[15]

On the Ajmer–Khandwa line, 21 km from Indore, there is a station called Mahu, and 23 km from Mahu is a hill called Janapawa Parvat. This hill has a lake where temples of Janakeśvara Mahādeva and Bhairavanātha are situated. Some people believe that Jamadagni lived here in his ashram and Paraśurāma was born at this place. It is here that Reṇukā was killed and resurrected.[16] The temple of Paraśurāma at Jamu Koti, in Himachal Pradesh, is

also believed to be his birthplace.[17] Here he is also worshipped as a guardian against cattle diseases.[18]

Baluani village is situated 25 km from Merrut in the west on the bank of river Hara. Nearly 2 km from here in the north is a place, which is believed to have been the ashram of Jamadagni. People here are convinced that it is the birthplace of Paraśurāma. According to local legends, on the other banks of this very river Paraśurāma had killed Sahasrārjuna in the war. The Hara river is called Hindon these days, and it originates in the Shiwalik range.[19] Similarly, many places like Paraśurāma *Kuṇḍa*, Atterala, Matri Kuṇḍin, Tīrthahalli, Kurukshetra and Jind claim that Paraśurāma atoned for his sins of matricide and the annihilation of kshatriyas at that place. These examples highlight the real mythical nature of the alleged historical events reflected in Indian mythology and believed by many people.

Chandragutti in the Shimoga district of Karnataka is also associated with the legend of Jamadagni and Reṇukā. The latter is said to have performed the *sahagamana* ritual and became a *sati*, leaving to her son Paraśurāma the fulfilment of her curse upon Kārtavīrya Arjuna, the murderer of her husband.[20] Several places are claimed to be the location of Paraśurāma's feat or Jamadagni's ashram and *tapobhūmī* in the local tradition of these different regions. For instance, 135 km from Bangalore is a hill called Vidiṅgagiri. On the hill in the Champakāraṇya area is a temple of Śrīnivāsa. Here a river flows which is known as the Bhārgavī river, which is considered holy and is believed that Paraśurāma performed penances here.[21] Punganur situated to the west of Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh is also known as *Paraśurāma Kṣetram* as the sage Paraśurāma is believed to have done penance here.[22]

Paraśurāma is also said to have meditated at Kao and Mumail villages of Mandi, Neerath in Shimla and some other places in the state.[23] Again, 10 km from Srinagar on the way to Rudraprayaga, there is a village called Farasu which is believed to be the *tapobhūmi* of Paraśurāma.[24] Puṣkara *tīrtha,* which lies at the village Ponkar Kheri, 11 km south of Jind, is believed to have been

founded by Paraśurāma. The worship of gods and ancestors are rewarded with the merit of Aśvamedha sacrifice.[25] Loharaya near Bharuch is a *tīrtha* in the deep forest, where there is no water. It is believed that Jamadagni and Paraśurāma did penance here.[26] Sri Keśavarāya–Patana located in the Kota division of Rajasthan has many temples and *tīrthas*. It is said that after the destruction of the kṣatriyas, Paraśurāma came and performed penance here, therefore this place is considered a *tīrtha* on the bank of river Charmanavati.[27]

On the Gorakhpur–Gonda railway line there is a station called Balaramapur and 24 km from Balaramapur in the north Gonda district there is a settlement called Devipatana, where it is said that Karṇa acquired the *brahmāstra* from Paraśurāma.[28] Likewise, 45 km from Mughalsarai on Eastern railway is station called Jamanaia. It is believed that the Jamadagni ashram existed on the banks of the Ganga at this place.[29] Jamaitha village situated in the Gonda district of U.P. which is 26 km from Ayodhya, has an old pond called Jamadagni kuṇḍa. On the occasion of *Yamadvitīyā* a fair takes place here. It is said that an ashram of Jamadagni was located here.[30]

Another place called Sewadha, which is 22 km from Jhansi and 10 km from Jamadaro, is believed to be associated with the Jamadagni ashram.[31] Similarly, Devagaon is a *tīrtha* situated on the confluence of the river Narmada and Badhenar in Madhya Pradesh. On the Sangam there are two temples of Jamadagnīśvara and Patāleśvara Mahādeva. It is believed that Jamadagni had an ashram at this place. On the occasion of Makarasaṃkrānti, a fair takes place at this location.[32] Mosale village, which is 12 km from Hassan, has a local legend that this place had the hermitage of sage Jamadagni in ancient times.[33]

In the Cumbum taluk of the Kurnool district of Tamil Nadu, there is a huge tank formed by erecting a dam on a gorge on the flow of the Gundalakamma river. The height of the dam is 57 ft. The traditional belief is that the sage Jamadagni built the tank. It is also said to have been constructed or considerably improved,

by the Gajapatis of Kaliṅga in the 15th century CE and to have been restored later by the Vijayanagar princess Varadarājamma.[34]

There appear to have been several places which were named after Paraśurāma. One such village is Parasrampur in Partapgarh district of Uttar Pradesh on the banks of the river Sai.[35] Another Parasrampur was situated in the Kheri district of the erstwhile United Province, which had a bigger population of cattle breeders than agriculturists.[36] Another Parasrampur is in tehsil Hariya, pargana Amroha of Basti district.[37] There is a Pasraurama outpost in Tripura also in Chhangalneya thana.[38] A hill pass has been named Paraśurāma Pass, which lies between Chiplun and Dabhol. Even the hill in Pedhe which has famous Paraśurāma temple, is called Paraśurāma hill.[39]

3. Temple Myths

There are several temples all over India whose foundation and construction is attributed to Paraśurāma. Many of them are called Paraśurāmeśvara temples. Some of these Paraśurāmeśvara temples might have been shrines, earlier dedicated to Paraśurāma. One important example is an early Viṣṇu temple at Śiṛudāvūr in the Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu, which dates from the period of Āditya II Karikāla, whose inscriptions are the earliest among those found in the temple. In the inscriptions of the Cōḷas, Āditya II, Rājarāja II and others, the temple is called Paraśurāma Viṇṇagrāma. The name indicates that the temple was probably dedicated to Paraśurāma.[40]

Similarly, Ramanathapura village, which lies in Arkalgud taluk of Hassan district is a noted centre of pilgrimage and has been called *Dakṣiṇa Kāśī*. There is a pond and seven temples in this village. One of them is called Prasanna Rāmeshvara temple, which is the most important among them. It is dedicated to Śiva and constructed in the old Hoyśāḷa style. The car festival of this deity takes place on the *Vaiśākha Śukla Tṛtīya*, which is famous as the birthday of Paraśurāma.[41] Therefore, these temples indicate appropriation of this early Paraśurāma temple by other cult figures.

But even if they were not Paraśurāma temples at an earlier date, his association with the establishment of these temples throws important light on the use of the Paraśurāma myth in the sanctification of a given space. Some of the Paraśurāmeśvara temples are located at Bhubaneshwar, Atterala, Cuddapah and Guddimallam.[42]

There are many Paraśurāmeśvara temples in other parts of the country. For instance, at Hiremagalur in the Chikmagalur district of Karnataka, a Paraśurāmeśvara temple was patronised by Nītimārga I [853–869 CE] of the Ganga dynasty, who constructed a *maṇḍapa* and gifted lands to this temple.[43] Similarly, at Tīrthahalli, which is a famous *tīrtha* located 50 km from Shimoga on the banks of river Tunga, has a temple which is known as Paraśurāmeśvara Śiva temple. Near the village there is a waterfall, which is famous as a Paraśurāma *Tīrtha*.[44] Kalahasti near Madras [now Chennai], Chingleput and Tirupati on the banks of the Svarṇamukhi river has a Śrī Kālahastīśvara temple. In the campus of this temple complex there are several temples, one of which is called Paraśurāmesvara Śiva.[45] Baluani village, situated 25 km from Meerut, has a Paraśurāmesvara Śivaliṅga temple.[46]

Apart from these Paraśurāmeśvara temples, many other temples are said to have been established by Paraśurāma. In a village named Durgadahalli in the Kadur district of Karnataka, there is a Kālabhairava temple. There is no inscription found in the temple, but the local tradition ascribes the consecration of the image to Paraśurāma. The construction of the temple is credited to Janakachari, while the daughter of a Ballāḷarāya is said to have endowed the temple with 9 *varāhas* from the interest of which 9 *khaṇḍugas* of paddy were to be used for the *amṛtapaḍi* of the temple.[47] The famous Sabarimala shrine at Kottayam is also believed to have been established by Paraśurāma. He is said to have consecrated the main image of Ayyappā on Makara Saṃkrānti and asked every king to celebrate this day every year.[48]

Varakkal, 2 km to the north of Calicut, has a temple that stands at a prominent position on a high ground upon the shore of a very shallow backwater. The Varakkal temple is said to be of ancient

origin and tradition ascribes its foundation to Paraśurāma. It is dedicated to Durgā and in her honour the Daśaharā festival is celebrated in great style every year.[49]

Vaikom in Kottayam is famous for its great temple dedicated to Śiva, also known as *Dakṣiṇa Kāśī*. The temple is said to have been constructed by Paraśurāma, the legendary founder of Kerala. The story goes that he found the sacred Liṅgam submerged in the shallow water on the shore of Vembanad Lake, removed it to the present spot and built a temple there. The sage is said to have stayed here for one year, performing the ceremony of *sahasra-kalaśam* and feeding a number of brahmanas daily. This tradition established by Paraśurāma is continued to this day.[50] According to *Keralotpatti*, Paraśurāma, with the object of guarding the newly created country, is said to have established several temples dedicated to Sastha along the Ghats and several other to Goddess Bhagavatī along the coast. The chief temples of Sastha are those at Achenkovil, Kulathuphuza and Aryankavu in Quilon district and Sabarimala in Kottayam district.[51]

Belapur village in the Srirampur tehshil of Ahmadnagar district has several Śiva temples. One of them is the Rāmeśvara temple, which is believed to have been established by Paraśurāma.[52] Śāntā Durgā temple of Kaivalyapur is situated in the Fonda Mahal's Kavale village of modern Goa. It is said that this Durgā image was brought from Mithilā or Tirhut. When Paraśurāma invited brahmanas from Mithilā to get his *yajña* performed, then these brahmanas brought this Durgā, their guardian deity, along with them. They established this image in the village called Kosi. After the Portuguese victory over this territory, the same image was established in the Kaivalyapur.[53]

The belief in Paraśurāma's being the founder of temples is not limited to south India, as there are similar instances in the north as well. Nirmanda in the Kullu valley of Himachal Pradesh, which is a famous cult centre of Paraśurāma, also has an Ambikā temple, which according to the local legend was founded by Paraśurāma. It is also believed that Paraśurāma performed a penance here. It is considered a *siddhapīṭha*. The image of the

goddess has two hands. It is also believed that Paraśurāma had performed a sacrifice here and had settled many of the brahmanas at this place.[54] Gopeśvara lies around 6 km from Kedarnatha on the way to Badarinatha. Here a temple of Śiva is located in which the *paraśu* or axe of Paraśurāma and the *triśūla* made of eight metals is the main attraction.[55]

Gaḍhamukteśvara, 43 km in the south east of Meerut on the right bank of the river Ganga has a temple of Kalyāṇeśvara Mahādeva whose image is believed to have been established by Paraśurāma.[56] Udawad village, situated at 37 km from Nāthadvārā in Rajasthan has a temple called Paraśurāma Mahādeva. A big fair on Śivarātri takes place here.[57] Sinor in Gujarat located on the north bank of the Narmadā has a temple of Niṣkalaṅkeśvara, which is believed to have been established by Paraśurāma.[58]

4. Political and Dynastic Myths

Many royal dynasties have used the Paraśurāma legends in a variety of ways. For example, the rulers of Eḍapilli, a tiny state near Cochin, who belonged to the Namboodri caste of brahmanas, claimed that their dynasty existed from the days when land was created by Paraśurāma. They used the land creation myth of Paraśurāma in order to gain legitimacy for their rule.[59] But a more widespread form of the use of the Paraśurāma myth by the then political order may be seen in some of the inscriptions where kings and sometimes even feudatories have compared their own achievements with Paraśurāma, the legendary hero and sage. These inscriptions recount the achievements and related narratives of Paraśurāma in this context. For example, the *praśasti* of Rājendra I mentions the legends which developed around the image of Paraśurāma and also indicates his close association with Śiva. It is claimed that none except Śiva could subjugate the country of Paraśurāma. Paraśurāma, though an avatāra of Viṣṇu, was also a worshipper of Śiva. Perhaps it is the latter idea which greatly appealed to the Cōḷas, evidently because of their special predilection to the Śaiva faith, especially from the period of Rājarāja I. It is in a *praśasti* contained in the inscription of Rājendra

I [1012-44 CE] that the legends surrounding Paraśurāma figure prominently in connection with the military achievements of the king, who conquered the country that was Paraśurāma's creation.[60]

The Tiruvālaṅgāḍu plates of the sixth year of the Rājendra I [1018 CE] states that the king, after the conquest of the Telugu country, advanced against and conquered the country created by Paraśurāma. In this inscription it is said that the king Madhurāntaka or Rājendra, having heard of the humiliation to which the rulers of the earth were subjected by the Bhārgava on the battlefield [and] not being able to meet him in the battle on the earth, set his mind upon the country called after him. The next verse goes on to say that except Parameśvara [Śiva], none else could even contemplate in his mind to humiliate that country which is protected by the glory of the crest jewel of the Bhārgava race [Paraśurāma] and which since then has not been injured by enemies.

The Tirumalai rock inscription of the 13th year of the same king gives more details. It says that Paraśurāma deposited the crown of the king of Kerala made of pure gold, worthy of Tiru [Lakṣmi], in Sāndimattivu, whose fortification he considered to be impregnable and that Paraśurāma, in anger bound the kings twenty-one times in the battle.[61] The Jejuri plates [Śaka 609, 687 CE] and Poona plates [Śaka 612, 690 CE] of the Chalukya king Vinayāditya are perhaps the earliest inscriptional references to the use of the Paraśurāma myths by kings to enhance their image. They say that as Paraśurāma conquered all kings, similarly Pallavas, Kalabhra, Kerala, Haihayas, Mālava, Cōḷa, etc. were conquered by Vinyāditya.[62] Likewise, the Tirumella inscription [680 CE] of the Chalukya king Vikramāditya indirectly hints at the Paraśurāma myth of Kārtavīrya annihilation.[63]

The Chandrehe inscription of Prabodha Śiva [CE973] from Baghelkhanda says, "Prabōdha Śiva was foremost among all his [Parśānta Śiva's] disciples, just as Paraśurāma was of the enemy of Madana [i.e. Śiva], who had conquered all enemies, who had placed the earth under obligation by bestowing riches on the qualified."[64] The Sudi inscription [900 CE] of a small feudatory called Dadinga introduces his lineage in these words: "When

Jāmadagnya [Paraśurāma] came in the course of his wanderings, in which he destroyed the kshatriya race, there were born from caves of mount Kiṣkindhā certain heroes, from whom sprang the members of Bali race, who are ornaments of Bappuras."[65] The Ajaygadh Stone inscription of Nana [VS1345,1288 CE] says: "Victorious be that renowned Paraśurāma, of the great intelligence, the abode of victory and fame, who placed the earth in the hands of the brahmanas after acquiring its governance and who made the wives of the enemies sad."[66]

Apart from the use of Paraśurāma myths in a direct manner, many of the inscriptions compare their donors with Paraśurāma as a literary symbol. Many inscriptions refer to Paraśurāma in the *praśasti* section, comparing the king with him as a hero and formidable warrior. For example, an inscription of Rājamalla [975-995 CE] describes him as "the cause of the destruction of the multitude of his foes" and makes a vague reference to his conquest and compares him to Paraśurāma."[67]

The Kolhapur inscription [Śaka 1058] of Gaṇḍarādityadeva of the Śilāhara dynasty compares him to Paraśurāma among others as follows: "... like Kālāgni-rudra in slaying with their gaze; like Paraśurāma in seeking out and slaying slayers like a rut blinded furious elephant in trampling down."[68] The Bayana Inscription of Chitralekha [vs1012, CE955] relates that "to him was born a son [named] Rajayika, who was like Jāmadagnya [Paraśurāma] in as much as he cut off the head of warriors in battle with [perfect] ease".[69] The Tsandavolu inscription of Buddharāja [Śaka 1093, 1171 CE] composed in Telugu script says, "Hail the glorious *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara* Koṇḍapadmati Buddharāja ... the destroyer of hostile armies, ... a Hariśchandra in truthfulness, a Paraśurāma in [keeping] vow."[70] The Annavarapadu plates of Katya Vema Reddy says, "Baring Anavema and Bhārgava [Paraśurāma] no else had either overcome all the kings or satisfied all the brahmanas in his world."[71]

The Teki plates of Rājarāja Choḍagaṅga [1084 CE] of Eastern Chalukyas says, "This ocean has plentiful supplies and heaps of wonderful gems, surely [became it] fears a repetition [its] bridging,

retreating, stiring, swallowing and overleaping from him [who is] a Rāmabhadra in archery, a Bhārgava in splitting hosts of enemies, Mandara mountain in firmness." [72] Many other inscriptions make such references to the Paraśurāma myth, which can be found in the inscriptions of Indrarāja III,[73] Māndhāta Plates of Devapāla and Jayavarmana II,[74] copper plates of the Eastern Chālukya princes,[75] Ajmer stone inscription of Chāhmānas,[76] Māndhāta plates of Paramāra Jayasiṃha Siṃha Jayavarma, Vilāsa grant of Prolaya-Nāyaka,[77] Brahmeśvara Temple stone inscription of Udyotakesari,[78] etc.

Apart from inscriptions, there have been efforts to read the reflection of the Paraśurāma myths in various series of coins. For example, some Chera coins bear the symbol of the battle axe, which has been interpreted as the representation of the famous axe of Paraśurāma and may have been the special symbol of Kerala with its centre near Tiruvanantapuram. These Cera coins were interpreted as being indicators of some king whose name or religion was specially connected with Paraśurāma or these may also suggest a Chera conquest of south Kerala."[79] In fact, the Paraśu was one of the elements among the royal insignia of Mysore even in later days. [80]

A coin of Kulōttuṅga I representing standing and 'seated figures of the king with a Tamil legend' type has been presented as numismatic evidence of the use of Paraśurāma's mythical axe by the political order of the day. On the obverse, there is a standing figure of the king in front of him and to the right a large lozenge with a central pellet. The reverse has the seated king to the right, with the Tamil letter *cha* above and a fine battle-axe below. Other common coin-types usually attributed to Rājendra Cōḷa belonging to 1120 CE may be connected with the Kerala region. The battle-axe may be the axe of Paraśurāma, who is said to have recovered Travancore and the Konkan from the ocean. The symbol of moon of some of the Cōḷa type coins gradually assumes the form of the Tamil *cha,* which may stand for *Cherala*, the old Tamil spelling of Kerala.[81]

Common people have attributed even those coins that have no visible link with Paraśurāma's symbols to him. For instance, a batch of 37 coins having a weight of 6 grains each was found at Kamblipur in Anekal taluk of Bangalore district. All of them are what is popularly known a *Viraraya faṇam* [or haṇas], which were originally issued from Malabar. They turn up in large numbers in different parts of southern India and must, therefore, have once had a wide circulation. But the tradition on the west coast ascribes these coins to Paraśurāma.[82] Similarly, the small spangle-like gold coins so frequently found throughout south India commonly known as *shānār kāsh* or *rāśīs*, hundreds of which have been ploughed up in the district of Coimbatore were also associated with Paraśurāma. In Kerala, people say that Paraśurāma, when he created Kerala, sowed gold *rāśīs* all over it and buried the surplus in the cairns which occur sparingly on the Malabar mountains.[83]

The political orders ruling over Kerala have given a lot of importance to the myth of land creation, specially that of Kerala by Paraśurāma, that they recorded their time and dates in terms of the Paraśurāma myth. The Kollam era prevalent in Kerala is dedicated to the memory of this mythological figure. The Malayalis call it Paraśurāma's reckoning and imagine that the duration of the era are counted in cycles of 1000 years, i.e. from year 1 to 1000 years and then again from year 1 without counting the hundreds. This may have been a method to assign a respectable antiquity to the era and to connect it with Paraśurāma who is very popular in the tradition of the western coast of India.[84]

However, more important than all these is to underline that Paraśurāma has served as a role model and a symbol of a non-kshatriya ruler from very early times. Even such powerful rulers as Mahāpadmananda and Nahapāṇa have been projected as a second Paraśurāma. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* while dealing with dynasties of the Kali age, says, "like another Paraśurāma, the scion of the Bhṛgu race, Mahāpadma will rule over the entire earth under one sceptre [or royal umbrella] and his command will never be violated by any one".[85] Again, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* says that the son of Mahānanda will be born of a woman of the shudra or servile

class. His name will be Nanda, called Mahāpadma, for he will be exceedingly avaricious. Like another Paraśurāma, he will be the annihilator of the kshatriya race; for, after him the kings of the earth will be shudras. He will bring the whole earth under one umbrella. Then the text goes on to narrate the succession of Chandragupta, Aśoka and his sons, etc.[86]

In the case of Nahapāṇa, the great Śaka ruler, a forceful argument has been forwarded, which connects him to the legends of Paraśurāma. It is said that the Karhada brahmanas, who were alleged to have been created out of camel bones by Paraśurāma, were actually linked with Karhāṭaka or the Karahāṭa, apparently so-called after Kshaharāta or Khagarāta, the family or stock name of Nahapāṇa. Karhada brahmanas represent the social evidence of Nahapāṇa's foothold in the Konkan. Nahapāṇa conquered Malwa, Konkan, and the Deccan at least as far as Karhāḍa, i.e. the sacred meeting of the Krishna and Koina rivers in the Satara district of Maharashtra at the beginning of the second century CE. His success and the magnificence of the religious gifts made Nahapāṇa a centre of many legends. Significantly, the mace on his coins has led to the suggestion that he represented the rebirth of the famous mace-bearing hero Paraśurāma. His great public works in the Konkan and the arrows beside the mace on his coins seem to incorporate the part Paraśurāma's legend that his arrows moved seaward and reclaims the Konkan. The assertion that Nahapāṇa represented the reappearance of Paraśurāma is supported by some papers in the Mackenzie collection, which make Paraśurāma the founder of a kingdom in the Deccan in the first century after Christ. A further connection is the defeat of the Haihayas by Paraśurāma and the defeat of the Āndhras, who derived their lineage form Haihayas by Nahapāṇa and his son-in-law Uṣavadatta.[87] If this connection is accepted, then we can identify a powerful ruling group as patrons of the Paraśurāma myth in the Konkan, who virtually made Paraśurāma not only the creator of land but also the creator of social institutions. In fact, the Paraśurāma myth appears strong in all those areas where the Śakas had established their rule.

There also exists a ruler called Paraśurāma of Mahāsthāna in eastern India. The ancient shrine and fort in the Bogra district of former the eastern Bengal [now Bangladesh] and Assam are identified as the traditional capital of this monarch, who is said to have ruled over twenty-two feudatory princes. But most interestingly, he was also identified with the mythical Paraśurāma, the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu, by brahmanas.[88] It seems that some of these kings not only projected themselves as Paraśurāma but tried to live up to the image of mythical Paraśurāma, which influenced their political behaviour and agenda. For example, the bulk of the population of the Dinājpur district belonged to the Rajabansis, who wished to be styled as Bhanga or Vrātya kshatriyas, and to be classed amongst the twice-born castes. They tell various stories of their origin, the favourite one being the well-worn legend that their ancestors were the descendants of kshatriyas who had discarded their sacred threads when fleeing from the wrath of Paraśurāma.[89] There is another possibility that they were referring to the king of Kāmarūpa in 640 CE and not the mythical Paraśurāma. Moreover, it seems that there were two rulers named Paraśurāma in this region, the first one reigned in the 7th century CE and the second in the 14th century CE, the latter's narrative includes conflicts with some Turkish rulers too.[90] It shows that some real historical incidents were assimilated in the Paraśurāma myth to develop the kshatriya annihilation narrative.

5. Caste Myths

I

There are four major groups of caste myths related to Paraśurāma. The first consisted of those myths, which were employed by land-owning brahmanas, especially on the western coast. They used these myths to legitimise their monopolistic control over land and propagated the belief that the western coastal region was specially created by Paraśurāma only for their use.[91] These myths also reflect various waves of migrations of these brahmanic groups and the inclusion of several new ethnic communities in the brahmana *varṇa*. Such groups as Tulu, Haiga, Konkani, Chitapavan, Nāga,

Machy, Namboodari and Karhad brahmanas have numerous traditional narratives to explain their socio-economic position.

For instance, the Konkanastha brahmana nurtures a tradition that Paraśurāma brought ten families from Tirhut in Bihar and settled them in villages around Gomantaka in modern Goa.[92] Another account in the *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* relates that Paraśurāma, defiled by the slaughter of kshatriyas, could not obtain brahmanas for the performance of the Vedic ceremonies for himself. He therefore recovered from the sea the strip of land now forming the Konkan and made it over to those brahmanas, whom he resuscitated from fourteen corpses washed ashore at the foot of the Sahyādri hills after a shipwreck. Since the corpses were purified on the pyre before being restored to life, the brahmanas so created received the name of Chitapavan. This legend indicates that the first ancestors of this caste might have come to the Konkan by the sea.[93] In contrast, Deshastha brahmanas claim to be the earliest settlers on the soil, having been brought from *Aryāvarta* by Paraśurāma from whom, it is alleged, they received the land as a gift.[94]

Regarding Karhada brahmanas, *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa* and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* say that they were created by Paraśurāma from a camel bone. However, it is well known that the author of the *Sahyādri Khaṇḍa* shows undue hostile feelings for all sub-castes. Most probably they were an offshoot of the Deshastha brahmanas and had separated from the main stock in very early times. Their ritual practices, specially those related to human sacrifice, have been used by some scholars as evidence of the assimilation of non-sanskritic elements in the ranks of brahmanas.[95]

All Tulu brahmana chronicles agree in ascribing the creation of the Malabar and Canara or Kerala, Tulava and Haiga to Paraśurāma. According to a Tulu tradition, after a quarrel with a brahmana who used to come to him periodically from Ahikṣetra, Paraśurāma procured new brahmanas for the reclaimed tract by taking the net of some fishermen. But when these new brahmanas lost their position, there were no brahmanas in the land, till Mayura Varman of the Kadamba dynasty brought the Tulu brahmanas.

The most interesting legend is narrated in the context of Nāga and Machy brahmanas, according to the legend Paraśurāma, in order to procure new brahmanas for the reclaimed tract, took the net of some fishermen, and made a number of brahmanical threads. Then he invested fishermen with it and turned them into brahmanas and retired to the mountains to meditate. Before leaving, he informed them that if they were in distress and called on him, he would come to their aid. After the lapse of some time, during which they suffered no distress, they were curious to know if Paraśurāma would remember and called upon him in order to find out. He promptly appeared but punished them for thus testing him, by cursing them, and causing them to revert to their old status of shudras. A modified form of the tradition states that Paraśurāma gave the new reclaimed land to the Nāga and Machy brahmanas, who were not true brahmanas and were turned out or destroyed by fishermen, Holeyas and Pariah, who held the country till the Tulu brahmanas were introduced by Mayura Varman.[96]

Namboodiri brahmanas of Kerala assert that their villages and social customs owe their origin to the legend of Paraśurāma. When Paraśurāma handed over their entire land to sages, it annoyed the brahmanas because they did not get any share in this arrangement, so they banished Paraśurāma. Paraśurāma performed austerities and got a boon from the gods to reclaim land from the sea god Varuṇa. He hurled his axe from Gokarṇa to Kanyākumārī. That is how Malabar came into existence. But he was alone in this new land. Therefore, to relieve his loneliness, he brought some brahmanas from the banks of the Kishtana river, but they did not remain there long because they feared the snake. Then he brought brahmanas from north India. He settled them in 64 villages. He gave them separate customs and asked them to follow matriarchy. Paraśurāma is also said to have made the rule related to maintaining *purdah* for Namboodari woman.[97]

Traditional accounts of Assam also indicate that Paraśurāma settled brahmanas near the present Paraśurāma *Kuṇḍa*.[98] Similarly, brahmanas of certain areas of the Himachal also believe that their villages were settled and lands were granted by Paraśurāma to

them. It became one of the tools of legitimisation of their control over the land. But in other castes, the Paraśurāma myth had other functions.

II

The second group of myths has largely been used by the middle orders and artisan castes who sometimes, due to improvement in their economic position or closeness to a ritual centre, tried to move upward in the *varṇa* hierarchy by claiming kshatriya or occasionally, even brahmana descent. They normally claimed that when Paraśurāma set out for the destruction of kshatriyas, their ancestors went in hiding and could not maintain the brahmanical lifestyle. Therefore they had to accept a lower artisanal profession in order to survive, otherwise they should be considered as kshatriyas.

Kāyastha Prabhu is one of the examples of such a case. They claim descent from Chandrasena, a kshatriya king from Oudh. Paraśurāma gave back King Chandrasen's life and children after exterminating the kshatriyas but asked the king not to train his children as soldiers but writers, hence they became Kāyasthas.[99] Similarly, the traditional accounts of the origin of the Kalitas of Assam say that they were kshatriyas, who concealed their caste for fear of Paraśurāma. They have socially held a position just below the brahmana and the kāyasthas but have taken up profession of black smithy in the Sibsagar district of Assam.[100]

Samanthars of Kerala claim to be of kshatriya origin and the descendants of the children of the Perumals and their kshatriya followers by Nayar women. The Samanthars themselves assert that they are descendants of kshatriyas who fled from the wrath of the renowned Paraśurāma and divested themselves of the sacred thread, lived in the jungles and wandered without performing *sandhyāvandanam* and other rites: thus they came to be known as Śāmantha or 'those without *mantras*'. They practised only *tantrams*.[101] Another account says that some kshatriyas, who, being afraid of Paraśurāma, and wandering in foreign parts and not observing caste rules, came to Malabar, visited Cheraman Perumal

and asked for his protection. The king, on the advice of brahmanas, classed these people as Samantan.[102] Tamburan, another endogamous community of kshatriyas, assert that they have *gotras* related to the Bhārgava, i.e. Paraśurāma which indicates that they are those kshatriyas who were condoned by Paraśurāma.[103]

Apart from these castes, there are some communities that are actually artisans by profession but affirm that they have a kshatriya descent. Some prominent examples of this trend can be seen in the caste origin myths of Chitrakaru, Gudigara, Bhavsar, Khatri, Perike, etc. Chitrakaru are a class of Oriya painters settled in the Telugu regions. They were primarily involved in the manufacturing of big wooden idols of *gramadevatās* like Ellammā and Mariammā and vehicle mounts of various deities.[104] Gudigara, who are a caste of wood carvers and painters, have similar narratives.[105]

The Bhavsars are mainly dyers and calico-printers and *dhobis* or washermen. They are mainly settled in cities and large towns of Gujarat, Maharashtra and many parts of south India. They say that the word 'Bhavsar' has been derived from 'Bahu-sar', meaning 'sprung from the arms of Brahma'. Regarding their origin, they say that when Paraśurāma, in fulfilment of his vow, exterminated the kshatriya race, a few of them escaped the general carnage by taking shelter in the shrine of their patron goddess Iṅgalā or Hiṅgalā Devī. The Devī, in order to save them from destruction, deprived them of their sacred thread and asked them to take up other professions. Those who were given thread and needle became tailors and those who were supplied with dyes became dyers. Apart from Iṅgalā Devī, they also pay homage to Khāṇḍobā, Bālāji, Hanumān and Paraśurāma, the incarnation of Viṣṇu and the slayer of kshatriyas. Paraśurāma is represented by a Panja [metallic palm] and is offered sacrifice of a sheep. Brahmanas do not take any part in this worship and the head of the household officiates as the priest.[106]

Khatris, a caste of silk weavers, cite a vague text called *Reṇukā Purāṇa* and assert that during the general massacre undertaken by Paraśurāma, five pregnant kshatriya women escaped and took refuge in a temple of Kāli. When their children came of age and

their marriages were celebrated, their mothers prayed to Kālī to point at some means of livelihood. In answer to their supplications, the goddess gave them looms and taught them weaving and dying. The khatris claim their descent from these refugees and follow the same trade. Interestingly, they claim descent from Kārtavīrya Arjuna. Their tribal deity is Reṇukāmbā, to whom Pongal [boiled rice] is offered and a goat is sacrificed in the month of Thai [Jan-Feb]. This indicates that actually they might have been from a tribal and non-brahmanical background.[107] Similarly, Brahma Khatris who are found chiefly in Broach, Ahmedabad, Surat, Junagadh, Kathiavad, and the Kutch region of Gujarat, are said to be descendants of kshatriya women. Perhaps they came to Gujarat 600 years ago from Punjab, due to the excesses of certain Muslim ruler. But they assert that when Paraśurāma persecuted kshatriyas, some of their women took shelter among the brahmanas. When detected, the protector saved them by giving the persecutors to understand that they were brahmanas.[108]

The Perike are a Telugu caste of gunny bag or sack weavers, whose traditional occupation was to carry salt and grains on bullocks and donkeys. Some of them made money in the grain trade and then they started claiming kshatriya status, saying that they were descendants of coward or runaway [Pirki] kshatriyas in the face of persecution by Paraśurāma.[109] The Golas of Gujarat are a caste involved in rice pounding and other menial jobs but claim descent from kshatriyas. According to their story, they were originally Rajputs of Chittor in Mewar, who called themselves slaves or Golas to protect themselves from the persecution of Paraśurāma. In another story, when pursued by Paraśurāma, they hid themselves in a Mahādeva temple. To make some provisions for the refugees, Śiva changed his discus into a mill, his arrows into a sieve, and his shield into a winnowing fan. He then ordered them to make their living by pounding rice.[110]

Not only the communities of villages and towns representing strongholds of brahmanism, but even some tribes of distant and marginal areas have used the Paraśurāma myths tc claim kshatriya descent. For example, the Lalungs living in the Karbi Anglong

and Nowgong district, who are one of the autochthonous people of Assam, represent such a group. Certain accounts claim that they were kshatriyas and when Paraśurāma set out to destroy all the kshatriyas to avenge the death of his father, the Lalungs decided to go into hiding and escaped to the Lailung hills on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. They stopped speaking Sanskrit and discarded the sacred thread. Eventually, they forgot their original tradition and language. When they returned to their home, they were not recognised as kshatriyas but were called Lalungs, after the Lailung hills where they had hidden themselves for so long.[111]

So, unlike brahmanas, who tried to maintain the status quo in their own favour, the middle order castes were aspiring for upward social mobility. They were more concerned about enhancing social prestige than establishing control over material resources. It partly explains why even modern socio-political movements of lower and middle order caste groups put social prestige higher on the agenda than their material benefit.

Apart from these assertions of kshatriya descent, one also gets claims of Brahmana descent by several communities, attributing their new status to Paraśurāma. For instance, Saurāṣṭra caste of Tamil Nadu has many accounts related to the fall of their caste. They were involved in the weaving profession but claim brahmanical lineage. According to one of the accounts, these people attribute their social fall to Paraśurāma. It is said that when Paraśurāma performed the *śrāddha* ceremony for his father in Saurāṣṭra, and invited the brahmanas of that region to it, they refused to participate. The sage, therefore, pronounced the decree that they should not only become poor but also leave their homes and wander without a settled home for centuries.[112]

The *anulomaja* Ambalvasis have several subdivisions, like Nambiyar, Nambissan or Pushpakan. According to their tradition, a brahmana suspecting his wife's fidelity during her pregnancy made her an outcaste. She was subsequently delivered of a female child, which was brought up by Paraśurāma. As the child was conceived and born during the period of her adulterous intercourse, the girl and her descendants became a separate caste."[113] Similarly,

Veriyar, another caste of Kerala, affirm that Paraśurāma created from water a class of persons for special services in temples, and to take the place of shudras, who, being meateaters, were ineligible for the same. Perhaps they were themselves shudras earlier.[114] Similarly, people of the Unni caste of Kerala, also known as Pushpakan, are generally employed in the temple of Sastha. They are said to have arisen out of the union of a brahmana woman in her menses with her husband. Paraśurāma set them apart, and gave them the occupation of making garlands in the temples of Malabar.[115]

Mussad or Muttatus, is a lower class of brahmanas engaged in the cleaning of the steps of temples of Kerala. Due to an alleged defilement in marriage, Mussads had to be content with a further lowly position such as that of guarding of the temples and images. According to the *Suchindram Māhātmya*, eleven brahmanas were ordered by Paraśurāma to partake of the remnants of the food offered to Śiva, and to bear the Śaiva image in the procession round the shrine on the occasion of festivals.[116] They thus became another separate caste group of Mussad owing their creation to Paraśurāma. Kaniyans in Kerala are supposed to be the teachers of bodily exercise and military training. According to their tradition, after settling Kerala, Paraśurāma established Kalaris or military schools throughout the kingdom, and appointed them as the masters to train shudra young men in all kinds of feats [1008 in number] for the protection of the country against foreign invaders.[117]

III

The third group of myths is similar to the second one, but they do not claim higher descent like that of kshatriyas. Rather, they battle for retaining some self-respect by attributing either their creation or allotment of their existing caste assignments to Paraśurāma. For example, Veluttedan are washermen and call themselves equal to Nayars. It is said that once upon a time a brahmana was washing cloth for a friend, and was on that account thrown out of his caste by Paraśurāma and then his children accepted this profession.[118] Similarly, Nayars, who are traders, artisans, barbers, washerman, etc. affirm that their caste is a product of the union between

Namboodiris and the *gandharva,* therefore Paraśurāma introduced them as a separate caste.[119]

Kelasi, a barber caste of South Canara, has invented a long myth about the origin of their caste. It says that an irate Brahmā cursed a *gandharva* woman on one occasion and cast her into the sea. She was doomed to be turned into a rock. But finally, moved by her requests, Brahmā relented and ordained that she should be restored to the human form when Paraśurāma should happen to set his foot upon the rock. This came to pass when Paraśurāma thrust back the waters of the western sea in order to create the western coast. The re-humanised woman thereupon offered her thanks giving in such winning words that the great brahmana hero asked her to request any boon she wished. She begged for a son who would in some way remind generations to come of the great brahmana, who had reclaimed her from her inanimate state. This boon was thereupon granted that she should give birth to sons, who would not be brahmanas, but who would perform functions analogous to those performed by brahmanas. The barber thus discharges certain priestly duties for shudras and cleanses the body even as the brahmana cleanse the soul. One of the blessings conferred on these people by Paraśurāma was that they would never starve. These Kelasis, therefore, work as agricultural labourers in their free time.[120]

The Kammālan are an artisanal caste of Malabar. They are carpenters, masons and do all works except that of leather. They accept themselves as a polluting caste. A Syrian Christian grant of 9th century CE refers to them as Aimvazhi Kammālas. There is a tradition that they were brought to Kerala by Paraśurāma, but left in a group for Sri Lanka on being pressed by one of the early Perumal Satraps of Cranganur to marry into the washerman caste.[121]

IV

Untouchables constitute the fourth group, whose narratives involve the myth of matricide and the fusion of Reṇukā with their own goddess. Madigas, an untouchable caste at the lowest level, are

scattered over a large part of south India. They were a numerous caste of leather workers and rope makers. Till recently, the Madigas had been animistic in their belief. Their tribal deity is Mātaṅgī, who is believed to be the female progenitor of the caste. It is said that she gave protection to Reṇukā, when the latter was pursued by her son Paraśurāma at his father's command. Paraśurāma in wrath cut off Mātaṅgī's nose, which was restored to her by Reṇukā. Since then, Reṇukā, in the form of Ellammā, has been revered as their patron deity by the caste.[122]

The Madigas have a practice of appointing a Mātaṅgī, who is then regarded as an incarnation of the goddess herself. She presides over purificatory ceremonies that precede all festivals. The ceremony of initiation into Mātaṅgīhood at Tumkur in Mysore has some rituals related to Reṇukā and Paraśurāma. In this ritual, apart from other things, the Vokkaliga priest ties two *bottus* or marriage badges, respectively called Ellammā and Paraśurāma on the Mātaṅgī's neck. According to one of the versions of their myths, the head of Reṇukā, the wife of Bhṛgu, who was beheaded by her son, fell in a Madiga house and grew into a Madiga woman. The origin myth of the Madigas says, "Brahma created ten sages who became the progenitors of mankind. The names of these *mahāmunis* are 1. Chapala 2. Tamila 3. Brahma 4. Neela 5. Pala 6. Bhadrachi 7. Raktachi 8. Gola 9. Jamadagni 10. Paraśurāma and from the first *muni* sprang the Madigas, while the brahmana are the descendants of the last one, i.e. Paraśurāma."[123]

The Gondhali were a class of Marathi beggars, musicians and dancers. Their tradition also claims that they were descended from the sage Jamadagni and Reṇukā.[124] Erakala or Kaikādi, a vagrant gypsy tribe, were given an evil reputation as professional criminals, settled between the Krishna and Narmadā rivers. Regarding the origin of the tribe, several stories are current. One mythical account relates that when Reṇukā, the wife of Jamadagni and mother of Paraśurāma, was bathing in the Ganga, she was beheld by a Dher [a lower caste]. That deprived her from the power she possessed by virtue of her chaste and meritorious life, failed to turn the holy sand into a pot to carry water home. Jamadagni, observing the

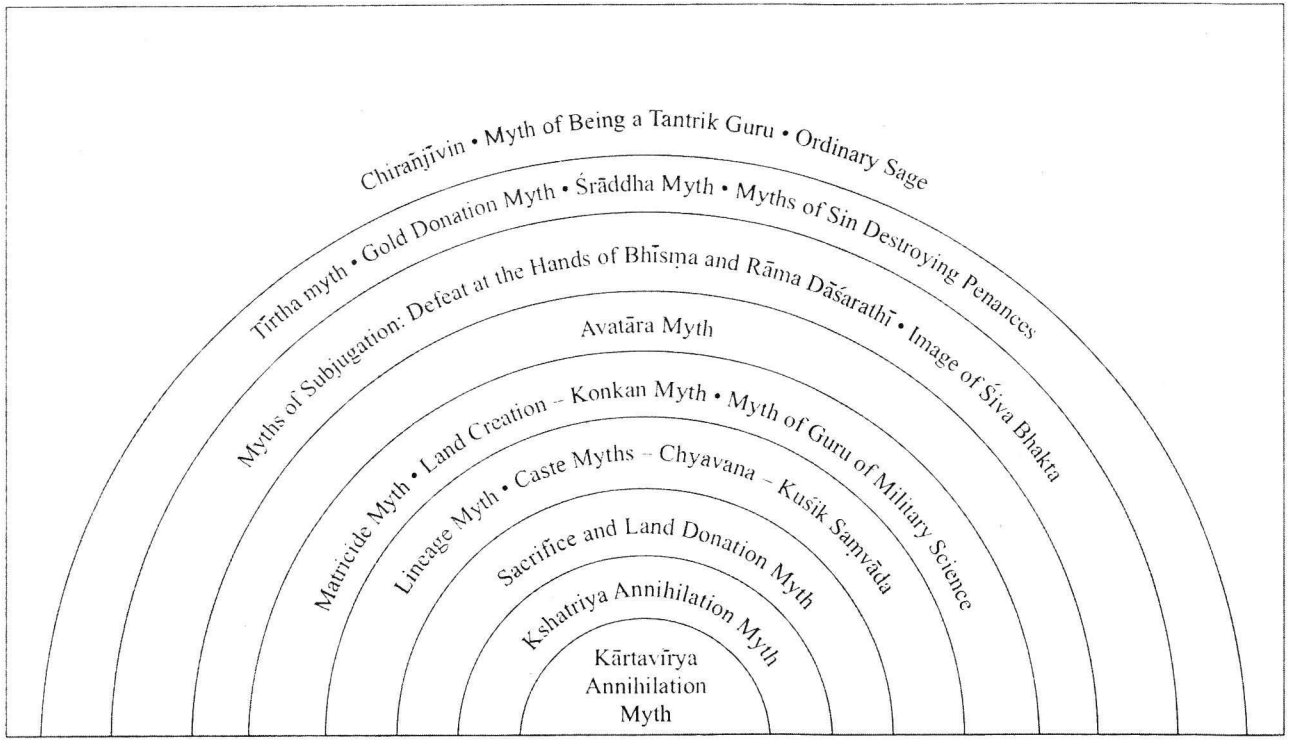
failure, and suspecting his wife to be guilty of a liaison with Dher, had them both beheaded by his son Paraśurāma, and thus a pure-minded and innocent woman succumbed to the rage of a jealous husband. Paraśurāma implored his father to suspend his wrath, and to show mercy to his mother by restoring her to life. At his entreaty, the sage relented, and desired Reṇukā's head and trunk to be brought in contact. In haste, Paraśurāma adapted the Dhers head to the trunk of Reṇukā, which so enraged the irascible sage that he cursed his son and doomed him to be the procreator of the vile race of Kaikadis. Reṇukā, who came to life with a male head, became, under the name of Ellammā, the patron deity of the tribe.[125]

Many other tribes and lower castes such as Are Khatik, Bedar, Dasari, Donga, Domara, Dhor, Golla, Jogi, Idiga, Mangala, Mochi, Mala, Mutrasi, Pinchakuntala, Padamasale, Paiyan/Pariahs, Patra, Pattanavan, Sanyasi, Tamadi, Togata, Uppara, etc. are associated with the worship of Goddess Ellammā and have the Paraśurāma–Reṇukā myth somewhere in their folk narrative.[126]

A brief survey of these ethnological accounts clearly highlights that different social segments patronised and propagated different components of this mythic cycle to achieve their own social goals. It is fascinating to underline that while upper class brahmanas emphasised land creation and donation myths, aspiring kshatriyas themselves propagated the kshatriya annihilation narrative. Some lower-ranking brahmanas and shudras used Paraśurāma's image of a lawmaker and a mythical ruler of yore. But most significantly, only the untouchable and the *atishūdra* employed the myth of matricide and the identification of Reṇukā with their own goddesses. It seems that untouchables were yearning to prove that there is no difference between them and the so-called higher castes. Nothing can encapsulate their social aspirations and psyche better than the head exchange myth.

However, it should be clearly understood that each and every caste or their segments did not participate in this myth-making process on an equal footing. Even brahmanas should not be seen as a monolithic entity.[127] The concerns of land-owning brahmanas appear very different from the lower priestly orders, who were

Table 7: Nucleus and Edifice of Paraśurāma Myths


Chiranjīvin • Myth of Being a Tantrik Guru • Ordinary Sage
Tīrtha myth • Gold Donation Myth • Śrāddha Myth • Myths of Sin Destroying Penances
Myths of Subjugation: Defeat at the Hands of Bhīṣma and Rāma Dāśarathī • Image of Śiva Bhakta
Avatāra Myth
Matricide Myth • Land Creation – Konkan Myth • Myth of Guru of Military Science
Lineage Myth • Caste Myths – Chyavana – Kuśik Saṃvāda
Sacrifice and Land Donation Myth
Kshatriya Annihilation Myth
Kārtavīrya Annihilation Myth

always in desperate search of new clientele. Probably these lower brahmanas were responsible for the survival of the Paraśurāma cult and myths. They extended the boundary of its social reach and even took it to the new tribal and non-food producing communities and castes. These were perhaps the people who appreciated the role of the Reṇukā myth and made it prominent in the overall narratives of the Paraśurāma myth through the composition of *Sthalapurāṇas*. For land-owning brahmanas, Paraśurāma became an avatāra or Śiva *bhakta*; but for lower-ranking brahmanas and the lower castes, he remained an independent cult figure. However, the brahmanas of higher and lower order cannot be confined to watertight compartments. The lower brahmanas of one period may rise into higher order through various means. But whosoever was at the bottom needed the existence of small and medium-level cults such as that of Paraśurāma and Reṇukā. So the social base of the Paraśurāma cult must be located among the lower segments of the society with occasional patronage of the élite in certain areas. Sometimes the élite groups of the marginal areas found this cult to be a useful tool of social communication in their region, or perhaps, since they had themselves moved socially upward in recent past using this myth like some groups in the western coast, they patronised this cult.

Footnotes

1 *Gujarat District Gazetteer*, Jamnagar District, 1970, pp. 631–32.

2 H.A. Rose,"Hinduism in the Himalayas", *IA*, September 1906, XXXV, p.242.

3 B.R. Sharma, "Impact of the Mahābhārata on Folk and Tribal Culture of Himachal Pradesh", in K.S. Singh, *The Mahābhārata in the Tribal And Folk Traditions of India*, p. 35

4 M.C.Behera, *Pilgrimage Centre Parashuram Kuṇḍa*, pp.31–32

5 Ibid. p.32–33.

6 M.C. Behera, op.cit., p. 35–39.

7 *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, X, 1880, p.355.

8 Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, pp. 116–117.

9 Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi*, pp.352–353.

10 Ibid. p. 252–253.

[11] N. Ramesan, *Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh*, pp.35–36.

[12] Friedhelm Hardy, "Information and Transformation: Two Faces of the Purāṇas", in Wendy Doniger, *Purāṇa Perennis*, p. 175.

[13] S.A. Dange, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myths*, p. 403.

[14] Friedhelm Hardy, op.cit., pp.174–175.

[15] L. Rice, *Mysore Gazetteer*, II, pp.105–106. There is another traditional account of the foundation of Kolar to the following effect. A herdsman named Kola discovered a hidden treasure, hearing of which the king, Uttama Cōḷa, sent for him to Kanchi, the capital, and being warned in a vision by Reṇukā in the form of Kolāhalamma, erected a temple in her honour, founded a city of Kolāhala and invested Kola with the government. The name is with equal probability derived from Kola Hala, i.e. Kola's plough, the implement, which turned up the treasure.

[16] *Kalyāṇa* Tīrthāṅka, p. 241.

[17] S.L. Nagar, *Temples of Himachal Pradesh*, p.212.

[18] *Himachal District Gazetteer*, Sirmur District, 1965/1969 pp. 326–27.

[19] Sidhesvara Sastri Chitrav, *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p. 394; *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.87.

[20] L. Rice, *Mysore Gazetteer*, I, p.275; II. p.427.

[21] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p. 326.

[22] *Andhra Pradesh District Gazetteer*, Chittoor District, 1979, p. 202–203.

[23] B.R. Sharma, "Impact of the Mahābhārata in the Folk and Tribal Culture of Himachal Pradesh", in K.S.Singh Ed. *The Mahābhārata in the Tribal and Folk Tradition of India*, p.35.

[24] *Kalyāṇa* Tīrthāṅka, p. 54.

[25] *Haryana District Gazetteer*, Jind District, 1986, p. 261.

[26] *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p. 439.

[27] Ibid. p. 285.

[28] Ibid. p.145.

[29] Ibid p.137.

[30] Ibid. p.145.

[31] Ibid. p 208.

[32] Ibid. p. 225.

[33] *Karnataka District Gazetteer*, Hassan District, p. 622.

[34] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1908, XI, p.7.

[35] *District Gazetteer of United Province and Oudh*, Partabgarh District, 1904, XLVII, pp.55, 199.

[36] *District Gazetteer of United Province and Oudh*, Kheri District, 1927, p. 243.

37 *District Gazetteer of United Province and Oudh*, Basti District, 1926, p. 126, 254.

38 *Tripura District Gazetteer*, 1975, p. 112.

39 *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, 1880, X, p.167.

40 R.Champakalakshmi, *Vaiṣṇava Iconography in Tamil Country*, p. 115.

41 *Karnataka District Gazetteer*, Hassan District, 1971, p. 654, 872.

42 *EI*, XI p. 223, 224, 228; H.Sarkar, *Architectural Survey of Temples of Kerala*, p.69.

43 I.K. Sharma, *Temples of the Gangas of Karnataka*, p.18.

44 *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p. 316.

45 *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p. 350.

46 Sidhesvara Sastri Chitrav, *Prāchin Charitra Kośa*, p. 394; *Kalyāṇa, Tīrthāṅka*, p.87.

47 *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1940, p. 61.

48 B.N. Sharma, *Festivals of India*, p 56.

49 *IA*, XXVI, December, 1897, p.342.

50 *Kerala District Gazetteer*, Kottayam, 1975, p.542.

51 *Kerala District Gazetteer*, Quilon, 1964, p. 665; Kottayam District, 1975, p. 553.

52 *Kalyāṇa* Tīrthāṅka. p. 250.

53 Ibid. p. 312.

54 S.L. Nagar, op.cit., p.170; *Kalyāṇa*, Tīrthāṅka, p.73.

55 *Kalyāṇa* Tīrthāṅka, p. 57.

56 Ibid. p. 88.

57 Ibid. p. 297.

58 *Kalyāṇa* Tīrthāṅka, p. 432.

59 Anita Raina Thapan, *Understanding Ganapati: Insight in to the Dynamics of a Cult* p. 234.

60 R.Champakalaksmi, op.cit. p. 113–114.

61 *EI*, IX. p.233, *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1910, p.28.

62 *EI*, XIX, p. 64; XXV. 291.

63 *EI*, XXIX. p. 162.

64 *EI*, XXI. p.150–151.

65 *EI*, XV, p. 106, 108.

66 *EI*, XVIII. p. 28.

67 A.M. Sastri, *Inscriptions of Śarabhapuriyas, Pāṇḍuvaṃśins and Somavaṃśins*, I, p.210.

68 *EI*, XIX. p. 33–34.

[69] *EI*, XXII. p.125.

[70] *EI*, VI, p. 273.

[71] *EI*, XXXVI. p.169.

[72] *EI*, VI. p. 346.

[73] *EI*, IX. p. 40.

[74] *EI*, IX, p.113.

[75] *EI*, XIX.140, 146, 151, 181–182.

[76] *EI*, XXIX. p.179.

[77] *EI*, XXXII.32, 143, 148, 241–42.

[78] Satya Narayana Rajaguru, *Inscriptions of Orissa*, VI, p.250.

[79] These Chera coins are of variety [B] Battle Axe and Sword type No. 7 similar to no. 2; *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1940, p.78.

[80] Ibid., 1938, pp. 47, 62.

[81] Ibid., 1934, pp. 66–67.

[82] Ibid., 1910, p. 45.

[83] M.J. Walhouse, "Kāsus of Paraśurāma", *IA*, July 1874, III. p. 191.

[84] D.C.Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy*, p. 269–270.

[85] *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* XII.1.10.

[86] *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* IV. XXIV. 4–5.

[87] *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, I, Part I, History of Gujarat, 1896, p. 497–498.

[88] *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, XVI, p. 437; F.W.Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteer*, Dinajpur, 1912, p.17.

[89] F.W. Strong, *Eastern Bengal District Gazetteer*, Dinajpur, 1912, p 34.

[90] *District Gazetteer of Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Bogara, 1910. pp. 22, 155, 157.

[91] F.Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Counntry of Mysore*,Canara and Malabar III, p.31.

[92] E.Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, II, p.391.

[93] Syed Siraj ul Hassan, *The Castes and Tribes of H.E.H Nizam's Dominions*, pp. 99-108.

[94] Ibid., p.109.

[95] Ibid., pp. 111–115, Thurston, op.cit., I, 393; Jarl Charpentier, A Note on Prathama Sakha Brahmanas, *IA*, *LIII*, 1924, p.124.

[96] Thurston, op.cit., I, pp.373–74.

[97] Thurston, op.cit., V. pp.152–154.

[98] *Lakhimpur District Gazetteer*, Assam, 1976, p.127-128, *Nowgong District Gazetteer*, Assam, 1978, p.112–113.

[99] *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, Thana, 1882, XIII, part I, p.87; H.A. Rose, The Indian Antiquary, XXXIII, *Archaeological Survey of Mysore Annual Report*, 1904, p.98.

[100] *Darang District Gazetteer*, Assam, 1978, p.126; *Nowgong District Gazetteer*, Assam 1978 pp. 113–114.

[101] "The Antarallas of Malabar", *IA*, XXXVII, 1908, p.336.

[102] Thurston, op.cit., VI, p.282.

[103] Thurston, op.cit., VII, p.7.

[104] Thurston, op.cit., II, 102–103.

[105] Thurston, II, op.cit., 302–303.

[106] *Junagadh District Gazetteer*, 1975, p. 262; Hassan, p.60–65; *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency* IX, part I, p. 117.

[107] Thurston, op.cit., III, 281–282.

[108] *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, IX, part I, pp. 55–56.

[109] Thurston, *op.cit.*, VI, p.192.

[110] *Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency*, IX, Part I, p.183.

[111] *U.M. and N.C. Hills District Gazetteer*, 1979, 88–89; *Nowgong District Gazetteer*, 1978, pp. 118–119.

[112] V. Rangachari, "The History of the Naik Kingdom of Madura" IA, XLIII, 1914 pp.141.

[113] "The Antarallas of Malabar", I A, XXXVII, 1908, p.336.

[114] Thurston op.cit., VII, p. 322.

[115] Thurston, op.cit., VII, p. 222.

[116] Thurston, op.cit., V, p. 121.

[117] Thurston, op.cit., III, 180.

[118] Thurston, op.cit., VII, p. 390.

[119] Thurston, op.cit., V, p. 284.

[120] Thurston, op.cit., III, pp. 270–271.

[121] Thurston, op.cit., III, p. 125.

[122] Hassan, op.cit., pp. 408–420.

[123] Hassan, op.cit., pp. 410.

[124] Hassan, op.cit., pp. 233–236.

[125] Hassan, op.cit., pp. 185–195.

[126] See entries on these castes in Thurston op.cit. and Hassan op.cit.,

[127] Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste*, p.61.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The results of our studies suggest that the myth of Paraśurāma originated in the post Vedic period, and by the Mauryan times his core narratives had acquired a large territorial dispersal. One of the aspects of the development of his narratives was the construction of a genealogy by arranging Bhṛgu–Chyavana-Aurva-Ṛchika-Jamadagni–Paraśurāma in a father–son sequence, which was completely unknown to Vedic literature. In the *Ṛgveda* the word Bhṛgu is either mentioned in plural or as an eponymous ancestor of a clan. Similarly, neither Chyavana nor Jamadagni has been mentioned as a Bhārgava, nor are their sons known at this stage. However, it was not a completely imaginary and baseless construction; rather, it was a blend of imagination and tradition, which arranged major ancestors and founders of sub-branches of clans into the father–son relationship. This genealogical construction also reflects the expansion and consolidation of the Bhṛgu and the Aṅgiras clans in the post-Vedic period, which consequently made them more prominent. The Bhṛgu clan had an important branch famous as Jāmadagnya Bhṛgus and Jāmadagnya Rāma might have been an important figure of that branch of the clan. That explains why he was given this name and how, later, Jamadagni was designated his father. The development of the Paraśurāma myths seems to be rooted in the warrior tradition of the Bhṛgu clan which was not only a participant in the *dāśarājña*

yuddha but which constantly nurtured the myth of their conflict with the kshatriyas in general and Sṛñjaya Vītahavyas in particular. In fact, the Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya conflict myth seems to be a case of the transformation of a community conflict narrative into the myth of hostility between two individuals, in which the intermediate stage is reflected by the Aurva–Haihaya conflict myth. It also possibly indicates that no myth is created *ex nihilo.*

It seems that the Kārtavīrya annihilation myth was the oldest and the primary myth associated with Paraśurāma, which defined the basic contours of his entire *charita.* Other myths were explanatory and secondary narratives, which were developed later, because all other myths presume the basic image of Paraśurāma as a great warrior and the annihilator of a powerful ruler. The Kārtavīrya-annihilation myth is available in many versions, which are not copies of any one master version but an enterprise to adapt this myth to varying social contexts. It is found that through emphasis on different elements, gradually the image of Kārtavīrya is improved in many versions at the cost of Paraśurāma. This transformation highlights the role of patrons in the composition of a narrative. Perhaps the dominance of kshatriyas in north India compelled the brahmanas to develop an alternative narrative to be recited in courts as part of the *vaṃśānucharita* of great kings. The Śrī Kṛṣṇa version of the Śāntiparva reflects this sentiment clearly in comparison to the Akṛtavraṇa version, which seems to have been developed as part of the internal tradition of the Bhṛgu clan. Some scholars believe that the Kārtavīrya and kshatriya-annihilation myths are symbols of brahmana–kshatriya conflict in ancient India. However, as this study suggests, the legend of Paraśurāma may have originated in the background of such a conflict, but once created, it ceased to a be an exclusive clan or varna conflict myths and became a carrier of varieties of symbols and meanings.

In fact, the kshatriya-annihilation myth, lineage myths, matricide myth and various ritual and donation myths expanded the ambit of the Paraśurāma narratives substantially by providing various kinds of explanations and by the incorporation of myths

of the other cycle. For example, lineage myths such as the *Charu* exchange myth and the Chyavana–Kuśika Saṃvāda tried to explain why Paraśurāma, despite being a brahmana, behaves like a kshatriya and Viśvāmitra, despite being a kshatriya becomes a brahmana. These were also perhaps part of the caste origin myths which tried to explain the birth of the brahmakṣatras and Kuśika/ Kauśika brahmanas. The ritual and donation myths of Paraśurāma such as the Paraśurāma–Vasiṣṭha Saṃvāda and the Indra–Bṛhaspati Saṃvāda are specially found in the background of *śrāddha, dāna,* and *tīrtha* rituals, which do not have significance for glorification of a clan. Similarly, *Ṣoḍaśarājakīya,* Kārtavīrya–Vāyu saṃvāda and Bhīṣma-Paraśurāma war narratives also have diverse social agenda. The matricide myth seems to be primarily a cultic myth, which was added to Paraśurāma's narrative after its contact with the Yeḷḷammā/Mariammā cults of south India. Paraśurāma's role as the guru of Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa also come in this category of secondary myth.

The study of these myths also shows that the evolution and expansion of epic and Puranic literature was not a mechanical but an organic process, which kept on transforming according to the sacred and profane necessities of the rulers and the ruled. The *Mahābhārata* and Purāṇas accommodate narratives of conflicting, perhaps even contradictory images. It seems that these texts tried to incorporate and harmonise as many myths as possible in order to be declared an all-inclusive text. Nevertheless, in this process none of the texts becomes representative of a single point of view or the product of a single school of brahmanic redactors. Therefore, the *Padma Purāṇa* portrays Paraśurāma favourably in Chapter VI. 24, Kārtavīrya in Chaper I.12 and at the same time depicts the humiliation of Paraśurāma at the hands of Rāma Dāśarathī in Chapter VI.242. Similarly, the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* narrate the story of Paraśurāma in great detail, but also add various accounts to assert that his power was based on the grace of Śiva and Kṛṣṇa or even on the help of Vasiṣṭha and Agastya. Therefore, neither is the entire mythical paraphernalia of a legend created by one person or group, nor utilised by them

exclusively in isolation. Sometimes people of rival groups and clans use these myths and then varied versions become part of that mythical tradition. In fact, the isolation symbolises the death of a mythical tradition, not its contradictory use. Once created, it becomes social property and it is exploited by divergent social and geographical entities.

Hence, the presence of myths associated with various brahmanical clans such as the Bhṛgu, the Aṅgiras or the Vasiṣṭha should not be seen as evidence of their *control* over texts as the theory of the Bhṛguisation of the *Mahābhārata* suggests. If we look into the redaction processes of the *Mahābhārata,* it appears that its final redaction occurred not along the clan and dynasty line, rather, it took place around the theme of *dāna, dharma* and *tīrtha,* for which many pre-existing myths of these clans were utilised. The *Mahābhārata* was now increasingly used for the propagation of the brahmanical value system in the society. In fact, the image of Paraśurāma takes a beating due to the violation of *varṇa* norms by him and several explanatory myths were developed to justify his aberrant social behaviour. Moreover, the role of the patrons in the creation of texts must not be underestimated. Brahmanas did not create these texts at their will and exclusively in their own interest. Their patrons and clientéle influenced them as well. The brahmanas were prime articulators of brahmanical values, but brahmanism was shaped through the participation of a large sections of the ruling class. The brahmanism was not just a *varṇa* ideology but a class ideology too in the ancient context.

The study of a range of cultic myths reveals how followers of various Puranic deities were trying to integrate the Paraśurāma myth within their own narrative and making an effort to prove themselves superior on the one hand and conceding a secondary space to him on the other. For example, Śaivite effort to dominate the myth and cult of Paraśurāma had two main modus operandi. The first was to claim that the victory of Paraśurāma over Kārtavīrya became possible mainly due to the weapons and the boons given to him by Śiva, and the second to assert that certain *tīrthas,* temples or shrines dedicated to Śiva were established by

Paraśurāma. Both these attempts were aimed at projecting Paraśurāma as a devotee or *bhakta* of Śiva. The myth related to the bestowal of weapons by Śiva to Paraśurāma occurring in the Karṇaparva of the *Mahābhārata* is an example of this trend. A similar exercise may be seen in the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* as well. In the same vein, myths explaining how Paraśurāma made Gaṇeśa *ekadanta* or single tusked and accounts of Subrahmaṇya's help to Paraśurāma in the land reclamation process presents an insight into this process of subjugation and symbiosis.

The myth of the defeat of Paraśurāma at the hand of Dāśarathī Rāma has been used by many scholars as evidence of the low popularity and virtual lack of influence of Paraśurāma in the cultic circles. Apart from that, it is repeatedly presented as a symbol of the brahmana–kshatriya conflict in ancient India. However, this study has tried to demonstrate that this myth is constructed after the core redaction of the *Mahābhārata* since it does not occur in most of the manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*, except in a few Devanāgari manuscripts. It seems that a pre-existing myth of war between Paraśurāma and Bhīṣma was put to cultic use in a later period to boost the image of Dāśarathi Rāma and it became one of the most popular themes in almost all versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The importance of this legend does not lie only in the making of Dāśarathī Rāma as a powerful persona but also for the weakening of the other Rāma in the Vaiṣṇava circle. It is quite possible that due to the similarity of name, since Paraśurāma is generally called Rāma in most of the ancient and early medieval texts, some kind of confusion prevailed among the followers of Dāśarathī Rāma. Therefore, the elements of axe and anger were over emphasised in the rival personality in order to contrast the two. At the same time, the other Rāma is made to completely surrender to Dāśarathī Rāma which symbolizes the usurpation of Paraśurāma's mythical and cultic power by Rāma in the middle Ganga valley. However, it is difficult to accept that it is merely a symbol of a brahmana–kshatriya conflict. The brahmanas themselves were propagators of this myth of victory of the kshatriyas over the brahmana and

Tulasīdāsa's presentation of Paraśurāma is much more negative than Vālmīki's or those found in other versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It reflects inter-cult rivalry more than inter-varṇa conflict. In contrast to Rāma, Paraśurāma's relationship with Kalki, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Rādhā is shown to be very cordial. Even Dattātreya is never seen in conflict with Paraśurāma but he attempts to subjugate Paraśurāma by claiming that he is a disciple of Dattāterya, especially in the southwestern Indian narratives. Some of the tantric texts such as the *Tripura-Rahasya* as well as the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* depict Paraśurāma as a devotee of Kālī, Rādhā, Pārvatī, Tripura and Lalitā.

As far as Paraśurāma's enumeration in the list of avatāras is concerned, probably he was consecrated in this list together with Dāśarathi Rāma between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE. It seems that the expansion of the avatāra list was inspired by the role model provided by Kṛṣṇa's image of the annihilator of an oppressive king. Almost all human incarnations in the *daśāvatāra* fulfil this criteria, except Buddha. The Paraśurāma myth provided essential elements for its inclusion in the avatāra list, i.e. destruction of an tyrannical king and being a saviour during crisis. Moreover, perhaps he had a cultic following at least in some parts of the subcontinent, such as the Konkan region and the Himalayas. Therefore, narratives developed around Paraśurāma avatāra cannot be seen as merely as the result of a "conspiracy" of one clan of brahmanas. The role of conscious factors in the processes of cult formation can only be limited in its scope and one should be careful to avoid a teleological discourse in the pursuit of historical reconstruction. The Viṣṇuism started gaining social ground only the Gupta period onwards and even then it might have taken many more centuries to become a dominant creed. Thus, to think that the Bhṛgus anticipated that Viṣṇuism will be the most dominant cult in the future and so they declared Paraśurāma to be an avatāra of Viṣṇu looks more fantasy than fact. The apotheosis of Paraśurāma as an avatāra of Viṣṇu was culmination of a long process of expansion of the social base of Viṣṇuism which ultimately established a symbiotic relationship between these two.

However, attempts to harmonise various cults and deities around the philosophy of *bhakti* in the *Purāṇas* actually proved detrimental to the growth of the narratives of Paraśurāma. It seems that his image of an uncompassionate brahmana warrior posed a big hindrance for the redactors of the Purāṇas, which ultimately led to limiting of mythological space occupied by Paraśurāma. Largely, his myths were accommodated as part of *avatāra*, *tīrtha*, ritual and caste narratives. In contrast, the *Mahābhārata* as an epic is primarily concerned with the theme of violence and its futility. Therefore, the theme of conflict, warfare, and weapons could easily be accommodated and elaborated upon in this text. It was more suitable for this text to be punctuated with the image of Paraśurāma at various places, sometimes not even bearing a positive representation. It explains why the *Mahābhārata* appears to be providing an extra space to this mythical character, accommodating a large number of his myths and literary references.

The evidence of the cultic presence of Paraśurāma may be gathered from his numerous *tīrthas* which developed in the early times around water pools and lakes, without any architectural structure such as the Rāmahṛda and Paraśurāma kuṇḍa/Lauhitya. Many of his living *tīrthas* centred on *kuṇḍas* are located at Kundin, Rainagiri, Jind and Kurukshetra, Atterala, Tirthahalli, Jyotiba Hills and Allahabad. In addition to these, almost 40 temples and shrines of Paraśurāma could be identified including such important living cult centres such as Nirmanda, Dadahu, Jamu, Chiplun, Atterala and Tiruvallam. Temples of Paraśurāma are found in many states such as Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh.

Apart from his shrines many areas have their local legends which associate Paraśurāma with the sanctification of their regions. The land creation myth of the Konkan and Malabar region is very significant, which is prominently reflected in the traditions of that region in texts such as *Grāmapaddhati, Reṇukā Māhātmya, Keralotpatti, Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa,* etc. The land reclamation myth seems to be a faint memory of some geological

upheaval and an immigration of brahmanas in the western coastal region. Paraśurāma is credited with the establishment of the *sapta Konkan* or seven regions of the western coast. In south India, the *Kṣetra* myth became so important that it overshadowed Paraśurāma's kshatriya-annihilation myth and became the most prominent one in the cycle of Puranic myths.

The study of some other aspects of the Paraśurāma cult and rituals such as *vrata, bhuṇḍā, śrāddha* rites, festivals and iconography apart from his association with the Reṇukā and Jamadagni cults, his presence as an avatāra in numerous temples and his association with folk rituals adds many new dimensions. Some of the Purāṇas, like the *Padma* and the *Varāha Purāṇas,* mention the *āmalaki ekādaśī* and *Jāmadagnya dvādaśī vratas* to be observed in the month of Vaiśākha. Although these rituals are part of a series of accounts describing *vratas* of various avatāras of Viṣṇu, they clearly depict Paraśurāma as a deity. It is significant to note that the myths and *tīrthas* shows a relationship with *śrāddha* rituals as well. Many of Paraśurāma's *tīrthas* are famous for performing *piṇḍadāna* and *śrāddha* rites. Even the *Mahābhārata* hints at a linkage between Paraśurāma narratives and *śrāddha* rituals.

Paraśurāma has also been associated with some of the regional sacred performances other than Puranic ones. The *Bhuṇḍā* sacrifice performed in Himachal Pradesh especially at the Nirmanda village is a good example of this type of ritual. A special text called *Parohaḍ* is recited on this occasion, which contains the account of many brahmanical villages settled by Paraśurāma and it has a similarity with the *Grāmapaddhati* of Karnataka. The roots of the *bhuṇḍā* have been identified in the rituals of human sacrifice, which might have been prevalent in the Himalayas as well as in several other parts of the Indian subcontinent from times immemorial. Therefore, the Paraśurāma cult might not have started this ritual but certainly it accommodated these rituals in the ambit of its cult in order to broaden its social base.

The historical records do not provide sufficient data on various festivals and temple rituals related to the cult of Paraśurāma,

therefore use of some ethnological studies is called for to demonstrate the cultic status of Paraśurāma in diverse regions. For example, the account of temple rituals performed at the Paraśurāma *Kuṇḍa* temple in Arunachal Pradesh and in Chiplun, Maharashtra show that Paraśurāma is worshipped just like any other Puranic deity. In fact, *Paraśurāma janmōtsava* celebrated on Vaiśākaha *śukla tritīyā* at Chiplun and some other parts of the country is as significant and popular as *Kṛṣṇa janmāṣṭami* or *Rāmanavami* in north India. The association of Paraśurāma with a martial sport festival called *thothe-ka-khel* in the Solan district of Himachal is another important evidence.

The development of the iconography of Paraśurāma is another area of his cultic presence and, contrary to the view of several scholars, his iconography shows considerable variety and departure from the classical dictum of the iconographic index. His sculptures show two as well as four arms with different weapons and symbols such as the *bāṇa, dhanuṣa, triśūla, pāśa, parasu, khaḍga, gadā, śaṅkha, chakra, musala,* etc. Some of his sculptures have features of Viṣṇu, but that is not the case with all of his images. His statues are in seated posture as well as *suchi, tribhaṅga* and *kaṭihasta mudrā.*

The presence as an avatāra in several Viṣṇu temples was an important form of his cultic manifestations. Here an attempt has been made to identify the location of Paraśurāma's depictions in various temples. The study proposes that any such portrayal closer to the ritual area, such as the *garbhagṛha* and halo of the Viṣṇu image becomes the object of worship and may be considered a cult object. Other portrayal on the outside wall or out of the ritual area may be considered as a decorative object or a part of the mythological depiction. Using this criterion, it has been shown that in even in regions where the Paraśurāma cult did not have any independent existence, it made its presence felt through a position in the avatāra depiction and thus he was worshipped in one form or other.

As far as the cult of Reṇukā is concerned, her transformation from a mere mythical character in the *Mahābhārata* to a popular

mother goddess in later narratives of south India was a result of the assimilation and amalgamation of numerous local goddesses, such as Mariammā, Yellammā, Bhūdevī. It seems that Reṇukā was primarily the name of a goddess worshipped in the form of an anthill among the pastoral people of the Narmadā–Yamunā valley. During the process of genealogy construction of Paraśurāma, this goddess was made his mother and the wife of Jamadagni. Since historical evidences go against accepting Jamadagni as the biological father of Paraśurāma, therefore it is difficult to accept Reṇukā also in the position of his biological mother. Probably her integration in the Bhṛgu genealogy was an act of humanisation of a female divinity, which may be seen in the context of the Urvaśī myth as well as many other female mythological characters. Moreover, in the south of the Vindhyas, Yellammā was also worshipped as the goddess of anthills. Therefore, it became easy to equate Reṇukā with her and through that equation, many other elements such as the worship of the female head and torso entered into the Reṇukā sect in a later period. Once the identification of Reṇukā and Yellammā was established, the myth regarding her beheading became inevitable. Therefore, the matricide myth was not the cause of her worship as a deity but an effect of it. Moreover, it seems to be a non-Sanskritic and cultic myth reinterpreted by Sanskritic tradition to uphold the brahmanical value system.

The cult of Reṇukā and Jamadagni facilitated the survival of the Paraśurāma cult in certain regions of the subcontinent. The Reṇukā cult gave a foothold to the cult of Paraśurāma in the southern peninsula and in turn got support from the devotees of Paraśurāma. The same group of people were responsible for the expansion of Reṇukā cult as well as the popularisation of Paraśurāma as a cult figure in south India. It seems that Yellammā is equated with Reṇukā only in those areas where both brahmanical and tribal, agrarian and pastoral populations coexisted, otherwise in purely tribal/pastoral areas Yellammā maintained her independent existence. Therefore, the rise of Reṇukā as a cult figure seems to be closely associated with the Paraśurāma myth and cult. Similarly, Jamadagni has a cultic status in the Himalayan region

which might have helped the Paraśurāma cult. Paraśurāma is identified as the guardian deity of cattle in certain areas of the Himalayas and in the *Atharvaveda* Jamadagni is invoked to protect cattle from disease. This appears to be the appropriation of a feature by Paraśurāma that was earlier attributed to Jamadagni.

The appropriation and perpetuation of the Paraśurāma myth by different social segments get reflected in the popular psyche through diverse caste, place and political myths related to him. The popular versions of the Paraśurāma myth, prevalent in folk narratives, give an insight into how Puranic myths are adapted according to the social thinking and worldview of the different groups. The study of narratives recorded at Ran village [Gujarat], Rainka tehsil [Himachal Pradesh], Alampur [Andhra Pradesh], Ratnagiri and Mahur [Maharashtra] and Saundatti [Karnataka] as well as Mishmi, Khampati, and Deori narratives of Arunachal Pradesh underline the interface of the classical and folk narratives in the villages of India. Interestingly, there are many places such as Kolar [Karnataka], Jamu [Himachal Pradesh], Balauni [Uttar Pradesh] and Janapawa hill [Madhya Pradesh], which claim to be the location of a single mythical incident, all pronounce to be birth place of Paraśurāma or the site of annihilation of Kārtavīrya. This further highlights the real mythical nature of alleged historical events reflected in Indian mythology, as believed by many people. Similarly, many places like Paraśurāma *Kuṇḍa,* Atterala, Matri Kundin, Tirthahalli, Kurukshetra and Jind lay their claim to be the place where Paraśurāma atoned for his sins of matricide and kshatriya annihilation. Many places declare themselves to be the region where Paraśurāma performed his penance. Farasu, Kesavaraya-Pattan, Vindingiri and Lohraya are examples of such sites. Paraśurāma is believed to have established several temples at Hiremagalur, Durgadahalli, Nirmanda, Balauni, Garhamukteśvara, Tirthahalli, Kalahasti, as well as the Sabrimala shrine in Kerala, Niṣkanlankeśvara temple in Gujarat, and the Śāntā Durgā temple in Goa.

Apart from place myths, the perpetuation and use of the Paraśurāma myth can also be seen in many political, dynastic and

caste myths. Several inscriptions mention the Paraśurāma myth and some of the kings declare themselves to be a second Paraśurāma. The inscriptions of Rājendra Cōḷa I and Rājamalla II are significant examples of such cases. It seems that Paraśurāma became an emulative symbol for non-kshatriya kings. Some of the Purāṇas declare Mahāpadmananda as a second Paraśurāma. There are indications that Nahapāṇa also claimed to be a representation of Paraśurāma. In later records, there are instances of some rulers calling themselves Paraśurāma and using his mythical image such as the examples of kings of Dināǰpur and Mahāsthān in eastern India.

Several castes have utilised the myth of Paraśurāma to fulfil their own social aspirations and agenda. Each social segment has used distinct elements of the Paraśurāma myths for this purpose. The land-owning brahmanas, such as the Tulavas, Haigas, Karhads, Konkanasthas, Chitapavanas, Namboodiris, etc. emphasised the land reclamation and distribution myth and asserted that the western coast was created by Paraśurāma for their exclusive use. In contrast, the middle order and artisanal castes such as the Kāyastha Prabhus, Chitrakarus, Bhavsars, Khatris, Perikes, etc. propagated the kshatriya annihilation myth and claimed that when Paraśurāma set out for the destruction of kshatriyas, their ancestors went into hiding and could not maintain kshatriya lifestyle. Therefore, they had to relinquish their real kshatriya status and had to accept a lower artisanal profession. This was an attempt on their part to achieve some kind of upward social mobility. Some of the lower brahmanas and shudras tried to use Paraśurāma's image of being a mythical king and law-maker to earn some self-respect by attributing either their creation or allotment of their caste occupation to them by Paraśurāma. Untouchables, viz. Madigas, Dhers and Erkalas associated themselves more prominently with the matricide and head-exchange myth, which had some scope to project them as equals with all other castes. Therefore, the Paraśurāma myth was perpetuated and patronised not only by brahmanas, but by a wide spectrum of castes and varṇas who participated in its process of preservation.

Table 8: Context of Paraśurāma Myths in the *Mahābhārata*

Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
1. CE 1.1.10, GP1.1.12	Excerpt from *Mahābhārata*	Reference to *Samantapañchaka*	Context- Tīrtha
2. CE 1.2.4 GP.1.2.1-11	Index of *Mahābhārata*	Kshatriya killing , oblation of blood to ancestors, appearance of *pitṛ* to stop Paraśurāma from further violence.	*Tīrtha*. Liberation from sin.
3. CE – X GP 1.55.16	Serpent Sacrifice of Janamejaya	Janamejaya compared to Paraśurāma	Literary Simile
4. CE –X GP 1.64.4-6	Incarnations of gods and demons as the characters of *Mahābhārata* [Cycle of Creation – Destruction]	Annihilation of kshatriya by Paraśurāma[tool of destruction]	Caste Myth, origin of new kshatriyas
5. CE 1.121.15-23 GP 1.129.51-66	*Vaṃśanucharita* of kings and sages, with special references to Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, [Droṇa as teacher of princes]	Droṇa goes to Paraśurāma to acquire the knowledge of weapons.[Paraśurāma as teacher of Droṇa]	Use of the image of best brahmana warrior and therefore most qualified teacher of military science.
6. CE. 1.169 to 171 GP 1. 177 to 179	Pāṇḍava's escape from lākṣāgṛha and self imposed exile-various Vasiṣṭha Myths [Oppressed Pāṇḍavas]	Myth of Aurva—Annihilation of Bhṛgus and revenge by miraculous child Aurva, surrender of Haihayas. [Oppressed Bhṛgus]	A Bhṛgu myth, but used by Vasiṣṭha to console Parāśara over death of his father. A kind of elegy-saga to be recited on the occasion of death.

Contd...

Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
7. CE 1.181. 16, 17, 20, 28 GP 1.189. 17, 18, 20, 32	Pāṇḍavas marry Draupadī	Arjuna compared to Paraśurāma by Karṇa / Paraśurāma as *guru* of Karṇa	Use of the image of formidable brahmana warrior
8. CE 2. 13. 2, 22 GP 2..14. 2, 22	Coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira/ narrative of conquest	Annihilation of kshatriyas – Birth of new kshatriyas/Akṛti compared to Paraśurāma/myth of conquest of kshatriya by Paraśurāma	Symbol of watershed and literary simile
9. Southern recension inserted in Sabhāparva	Conquest of earth by Pāṇḍavas	Arjuna compared with Kārtvīrya as well as with Paraśurāma	Literary Simile
10. CE –X GP 2. 37. 16	Arrival of Kings in rājasūya sacrifice/Śiśupāla objects to importance given to Kṛṣṇa	Karṇa as disciple of Paraśurāma	A repetitive symbol
11. Southern recension, inserted in Sabhāparva	Avatāra descriptions – Paraśurāma as an avatāra	—	—
12. —DO—	—DO—	Paraśurāma as an avatāra of Govinda , Paraśurāma's war with Śālva, Paraśurāma could not defeat him	Avatāravāda, Kṛṣṇa cult, kshatriya annihilation more emphasised than Kārtavīrya killing, Paraśurāma inclusion in Vaiṣṇava Pantheon
13. CE—X GP 2.53. 11	Coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira	Paraśurāma present in the court along with many other sages	Image of simple sage, not hero or Avatāra

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
14. CE—X GP 2.79.15	Yudhiṣṭhira lost in game of dice—going in to exile	Paraśurāma as spiritual instructor along with many other sages	—DO—
15. CE—X GP 3. 12. 51	Debate over necessity or futility of war among Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī	Paraśurāma and other sages are quoted that Kṛṣṇa is the first cause of the world	Endorsement of the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and symbolic presence of Paraśurāma
16. CE 3. 81. 22-38 GP 3. 83. 24-43	Yudhiṣṭhira and his party is visiting different *tīrthas* during their exile	Kurukṣetra as a *tīrtha*, where Paraśurāma created five pools of blood after annihilation of kshatriyas, boon from pitṛs that these pools will become a famous *tīrtha*	*Tīrtha* Myth
17. CE 3. 81. 139 GP 3. 82. 82	—DO—	Reṇukātirtha	Just name mentioned
18. CE –X GP 3.83. 159	—DO—	—DO——	—DO—-
19. CE 3.83. 2 GP 3. 85. 2	—DO—-	Lauhityatīrtha	—DO—-
20. CE 3. 83. 14 GP 3.83. 14	—DO—	Mahendra Parvat	—DO—-
21. CE 3.83. 40 GP 3.85.43	—DO—	Śūrpāraka	—DO—-

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
22. CE 3.85.11 GP 3.97.16	—DO—	Paraśurāma praised Viśvāmitra for his immense wealth.	—DO—
23. CE 3. 85.16-17 GP 3 .87.22	—DO—	Mahendra Parvat	—DO—
24. CE 3.86. 9 GP 3.88. 12	—DO—	Śūrpāraka	—DO—
25. CE 3.88.13,16 GP 3.90.16,18	—DO—	Jamdagni ashram	——DO—
26 CE 3.88.20 GP 3.90.23	—DO—-	Bhṛgutuṅga	—DO—
27 CE –X GP 3.99.39-71	Pilgrimage of Yudhiṣṭhira	Dāśarathī Rāma defeats Paraśurāma, who reclaims his lustre at Bhṛgutīrtha	A myth later than redaction of most of the Mahābhārata; Cultic aggression from Śri Rāma and absorption through humiliation.
28 CE 3.115 to 117 GP 3.115 to 117	—DO—	Akṛtavraṇa version of Paraśurāma myth describing his lineage and exploits	Most important and perhaps earliest Bhṛgu tradition of Paraśurāma myth, also situated in the background of *tīrtha*
29. CE 3.129.6-7 GP 3.129.6-7	—DO—	Rāmahṛda at Kurukṣetra	Just mentioned along with a weird myth about a sinful woman.

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
30. CE 3.130. 12-13 GP 3.130. 12-13	—DO—	Paraśurāma ashram on the way to Mansarovara	Just mentioned in the *tīrtha* list
31. CE 3. 204.12 GP 3. 214.13	Incorporation of many prevalent stories in the *Mahābhārata,* along with didactic narratives	Paraśurāma portrayed as ideal son	Literary symbolism
32. CE 3. 286.7-8 GP 3..302.7-8	Story of Karṇa's birth and life	Paraśurāma as *guru* of Karṇa	
33 CE-X; fn.242 Southern recension quoted in GP. P.1871	Pāṇḍavas were preparing for their life in hiding	Nakula mentions Sumuh as charioteer of Paraśurāma	
34. CE 4.43.16 GP 4.48. 18	Kaurvas attempt at abduction of Virāṭa's cows and Arjuna's war in its defence	Karṇa acquired weapons from Paraśurāma	
35. CE —X GP 4.51.10	—DO—	Droṇa as great warrior as Paraśurāma	
36. CE 5.48.27-28 GP 5.49. 27-28	Śri Kṛṣṇa and Bhīṣma try to convince Duryodhana about the benefits of compromise with Pāṇḍavas	Reference of Karṇa cursed by Paraśurāma	
37. CE 5.54. 51-52 GP 5.55. 54	—DO—	Paraśurāma quoted as saying Karṇa was equal to him.	

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
38. CE 5. 60. 4 GP 5.61.4	—DO—	Didactic Paraśurāma	Literary Symbolism
39. CE 5.61.1 GP 5.62. 2	—DO—	Paraśurāma's curse to Karṇa	
40 CE 5.61.17 GP 5.62. 17	—DO—-	—DO—	
41 CE –X GP – quotes-Southern recension	—DO—	Paraśurāma among many sages	
42. CE 5.94 to 96 GP 5. 96	Peace efforts by Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa *stuti*	Paraśurāma tells the story of Dambodbhava and Nara-Nārāyaṇa.	Endorsement of Kṛṣṇa Cult
43. CE 5.123.16 GP 5.125.16	—DO—	Paraśurāma declares Kṛṣṇa to be a god	—DO—-
44. CE 5.145. 23 GP 5.147. 24	—DO—	Bhīṣma–Paraśurāma war refereed	
45. CE 5.149. 26 GP 5.151 .30	Preparation for war begins, Commanders are being appointed	Śikhaṇḍi compared with Paraśurāma	Resonance of Bhīṣma-Paraśurāma war
46. CE 5.153.4-10 GP 5.156.4-10	—DO—	Haihayas were attacked by brahmana, vaisya and shudra together	

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
47. CE 5.165. 5-6 GP 5.168 .6	—DO—	Paraśurāma's curse to Karṇa	
48. CE 5. 166. 4 GP 5.168.33	—DO—	Bhīṣma–Paraśurāma war referred	
49. CE 5.174 to 187 GP 5. 175 to 186	—DO—	Bhīṣma narrates the story of Ambā and his fight with Paraśurāma in detail	
50. CE 6. 14. 7 GP 6. 13.7	Beginning of war	Bhīṣma–Paraśurāma war mentioned	
51 CE 6.15 .19-20 GP 6. 14. 21	—DO—	—DO—	
52 CE 6. 15. 43-46 GP 6. 14. 47-49	—DO—-	—DO—	
53. CE— X GP 6.23. 27	—DO—	Paraśurāma among many other sages who are making peace efforts	
54. CE—X GP –Bhagavadgitā	*Bhagavadgītā*	Kṛṣṇa Says: "Among wielders of arms I am Rāma"	
55. CE –X GP 6. 108. 45	Bhīṣma is wounded	Paraśurāma makes an effort to stop war	

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
56. CE 6.104 . 43 GP 6.108 . 45	—DO—	Reference to Bhīṣma–Paraśurāma war	
57. CE 6.116.34 GP 6.121. 36	—DO—	Paraśurāma makes an effort to stop war	
58 CE 7.1.43 GP 7.1.46	Bhīṣma is wounded and Droṇa is being appointed as commander of Kaurava army	Paraśurāma as guru of Karṇa	
59. CE –X; fn.vol 8, p.11 GP, quotes Southern Recension	—DO—	Karṇa uses weapons acquired from Paraśurāma	
60 CE—X; fn, vol. 8, p. 137-138 GP 7.23.70	—DO—	Paraśurāma as guru of king Pāṇḍya along with Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Kṛpa	
61 CE 7.33.4 GP 7.34.4	Killing of Abhimanyu	Paraśurāma ,Bhīma and Yama compared with each other	
62 CE 7.39.27 GP 7.40.30	—DO—	Karṇa as disciple of Paraśurāma	
63 CE—X,fn.vol. 8 p.264 App.I, no.8; vol 9, page 118	Yudhiṣṭhira is being consoled by Vyāsa at the death of Abhimanyu	*Ṣoḍaśrājakīya*—Paraśurāma included in the list of sixteen great kings	Typical Puranic narrative – recited on the occasion of *śrāddha* of Kshatriyas or a

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
63 GP 7.7. 55-71			narrative developed in south Indian tradition
64 CE 7.95. 15 GP 7.119.18	Arjuna has vowed to kill Jayadraratha to avenge the killing of Abhimanyu	Sātyaki's *sārathī* says even if Paraśurāma comes in his way, he wont fear	Literary use
65. CE –X GP 7.132.1	—DO—-	Paraśurāma as disciple of Śiva and Karṇa that of Paraśurāma	
66 CE 7.156.18 GP 7.181.18	Kṛṣṇa plans to exhaust Karṇa's divine weapons and got it fired on Ghaṭotkacha	Ekalavya compared to Paraśurāma	Literary simile
67 CE 7. 166. 4 GP 7. 194. 4	Droṇa killed and Aśvatthāmā vows to avenge	Paraśurāma referred as guru of Droṇa	
68 CE 7.166. 8 GP 7.194.8	—DO—-	Droṇa compared to Paraśurāma, Kārtavīrya, Indra, Bṛhaspati, etc.	
69 CE 8.1.37 GP 8. 2. 13	War at its peak, Karṇa is in command of Kaurva Army, shows valour and dies	Droṇa as disciple of Paraśurāma	
70 CE 8 .4.52 GP 8. 5. 54	—DO—	Karṇa–Arjuna war compared with Kārtavīrya–Paraśurāma war, along with many other mythical stories	

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
71 CE 8.5. 4 GP 8.8.4	—DO—	It is said that to see Paraśurāma in delusion is difficult	Literary use
72 CE 8.5.66-67 GP 8.9.45	—DO—	Karṇa acquired weapons from Paraśurāma	
73 CE 8.22.37-38 GP 8.31.44	—DO—	—DO—	
74 CE 8.24.131-160 GP 8.34 128-158	Karṇa shows his prowess and dies	Paraśurāma acquires weapons from Śiva	Śaivite section, appropriation of Paraśurāma myth
75 CE 8. 26. 56 GP 8. 37. 27	—DO—	Karṇa acquired weapons from Paraśurāma	
76 CE 8.27. 98 GP 8. 40. 49	—DO—-	Paraśurāma as *guru* of Karṇa	
77 CE 8. 28. 61 GP 8. 41. 78	—DO—	Paraśurāma declares Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as gods	Endorsement of Kṛṣṇa cult
78 CE 8. 29.1-7 GP 8.42. 3-9	—DO—	Paraśurāma curse to Karṇa	
79 CE 8. 46. 6 GP 8. 65. 4	Lamentation over Karṇa's death	Karṇa acquired weapons from Paraśurāma	
80 CE 8.51. 101-102 GP 8.73.116	—DO—	—DO—	

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
81 CE–X, fn.866, vol.10, p488, K4 ,T2GP quotes from southern recension	Karṇa fights and dies	Karṇa asked by Śalya to remember weapons given by Paraśurāma	
82 CE 8.66 . 3 GP 8. 90.4	—DO—	Karṇa uses weapons given to him by Paraśurāma	
83 CE-X, fn.1123,vol.10 p.586V1,B, Da, Dn, D1 3-7GP 8.90.82	—DO—	Karṇa forgets use of weapons given to him by Paraśurāma	
84 CE 8.66.42 GP 8.90.84	—DO—	—DO—	
85 CE 9.23.41 GP 9.24.43	Droṇa and Karṇa have died and Pāṇḍavas are killing the rest	Paraśurāma tried to convince Duryodhana for compromise but he did not accept	Peacemaker
86 CE 12.2.to 3 GP 12.2 to 3	Didactic section–post-war sorrow and depression / Bhīṣma on death bed	Paraśurāma's curse to Karṇa	
87 CE 12.5.11 GP 12 5.15	—DO—	—DO—-	
88 CE 12. 27.8 GP 12. 5. 15	—DO—	Bhīṣma- Paraśurāma war remembered	

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
89 CE 12. 38. 13 GP 12. 37. 13	—DO—	Paraśurāma guru of Bhīṣma	
90 CE 12. 46. 14,17 GP 12. 46. 14,18	—DO—	Bhiṣma's war with his guru Paraśurāma	
91 CE—X, fn.66,vol.13. p192 GP 12.47.9	—DO—	Paraśurāma present along with many other sages [more than 40 of them]	
92 CE—X GP quotes from Southern recension	—DO—	Paraśurāma as avatāra of Hari	Avatāravāda
93 CE—X GP 12. 47.65	—DO—	—DO—	—DO—
94 CE 12.48 to 49 GP 12 48 to 49	—DO—	Kṛṣṇa version of Paraśurāma myth	*Tīrtha* context, Image of Kārtavīrya improves; Āpava Vasiṣṭha,Sun/fire god myths—Paraśurāma loses importance
95 CE 12.117.2 GP 12. 116.2	—DO—	Paraśurāma as listener of story [dog-tiger-dog]	Fixture
96 CE 12.122.3-4 GP 12.122.3-4	—DO—	Muñjavata *tīrtha* linked to Paraśurāma	*Tīrtha*
97 CE 12 .141. 6 GP 12. 143. 6	—DO—	Paraśurāma as story teller to king Muchkunda	Fixture

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
98 CE-X GP quotes Southern recension	—DO—	Paraśurāma counted among avatāra	Avatāravāda
99 CE 12.326. 77 GP 12.339.84	—DO—	Kṛṣṇa tells that Paraśurāma is his own avatāra	Avatāravāda
100 CE–X, fn.851,vol. 16 p. 1863; GP 12.339.104	—DO—	Paraśurāma counted among avatāra	—DO—
101 CE 12. 348.16-17 GP 12.360.16-17	—DO—	Paraśurāma killed Kārtavīrya in anger, so anger must be controlled	Didactic use of myth
102 CE 12.353.6 GP 12. 365. 6	—DO—	Bhīṣma remembers his war with Paraśurāma	
103 CE 13.6.33 GP 13. 14. 33	Didactic section dealing with cults and *varṇāśramadharma, dāna, śrāddha,* etc.	Paraśurāma and Aśvatthāmā could not go to the heaven	Fatalism
104 CE 13.14. 137-140 GP 13. 14. 271-174	—DO—	Paraśurāma's weapons specially given to him by Śiva	Śaivite section
105 CE 13. 26. 17 GP 13. 25. 18	—DO—	Bhṛgutuṅga	*Tīrtha*

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Reference	Main Theme of the Parva	Theme of Paraśurāma Myth	Remarks on Use/Context/ Focus of Myth
106 CE 13.26. 41 GP 13. 25.46-48	—DO—	Lauhitya, and Mahendra parvat mentioned	*Tīrtha*
107 CE 13.52 to 56 GP 13. 52 to 56	—DO—	Cyavan–Kuśika Saṃvāda—Lineage myth	Caste myth / superiority of brahmanas over kshatriyas
108 CE 13. 61. 31 GP 13. 62. 34	—DO—	Land donation by Paraśurāma to Kaśyapa	*Dāna* myth, *dāna* on the occasion of *śrāddha*
109 CE 13 .83 to 86 GP 13. 84 to 85	—DO—	Paraśurāma–Vasiṣṭha Saṃvāda on the greatness of *dāna* of gold	—DO—
110 CE –X GP 13.106. 69	—DO—	Jamadagni threatens to shoot down Sun—Sun presents him umbrella and sandal	—DO—
111 CE –X GP 13.106.69	—DO—	Jamadagni among many sages who went to heaven through performance of *vrata*	*Vrata* myth
112 CE 13. 137 to 138 GP 13 152 to 157	—DO—	Kārtavīrya-Vāyu Saṃvāda on the greatness of brahmanas	
113 CE 13. 154. 21 GP 13. 168. 24,28	Bhīṣma dies	Paraśurāma–Bhīṣma war	
114 CE 14. 29 to 30 GP 14.29-30	Kṛṣṇa cult and *bhakti* section	Paraśurāma–Kārtavīrya–Salvation through *dhyānayoga*	Futility of violence / *bhakti* / penance
115 CE—XGP 14. 92 . 41-46	Viṣṇuite didactic section	Jamadagni overcomes his anger	

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